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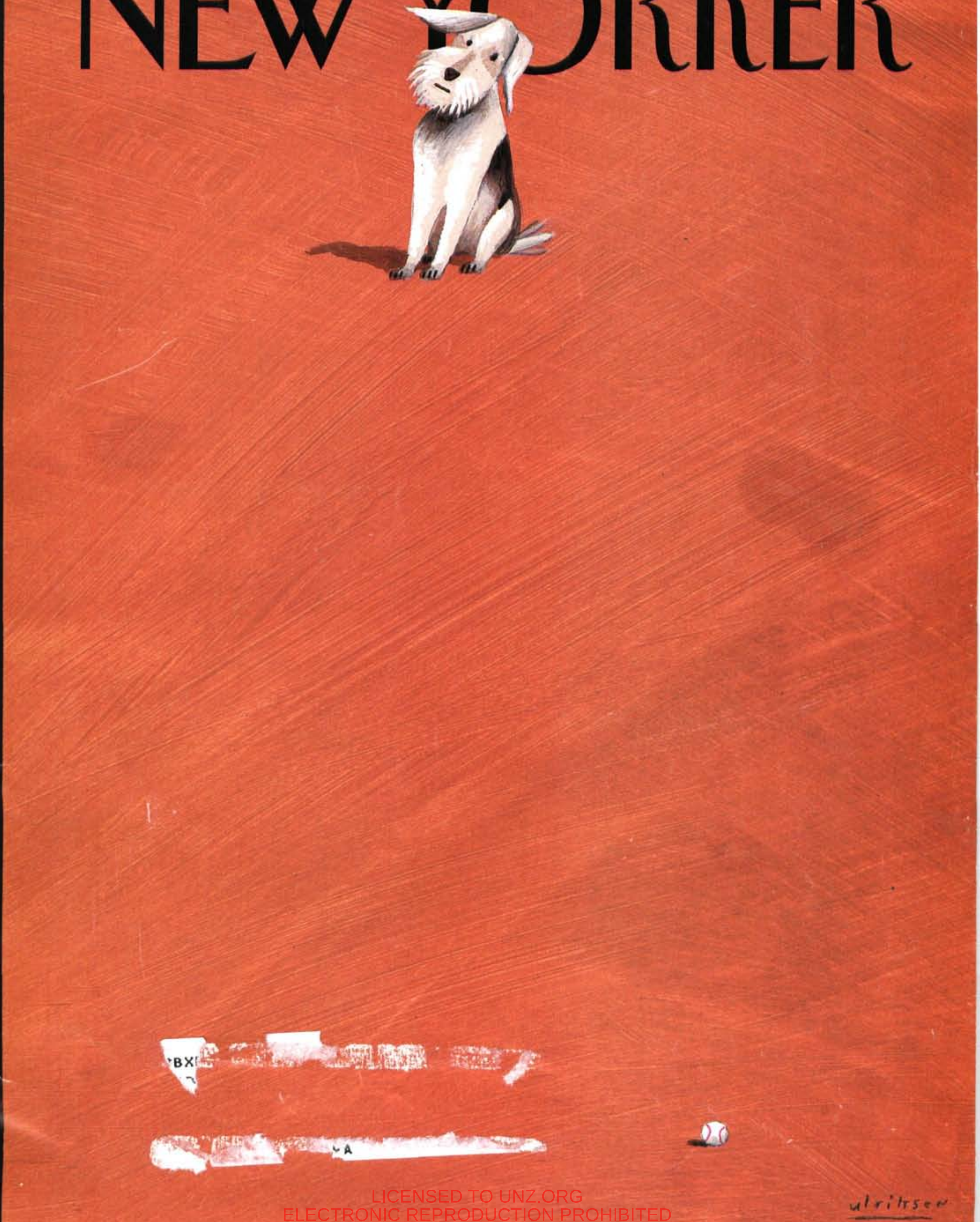
THE NEW YORKER

JULY 30, 2001



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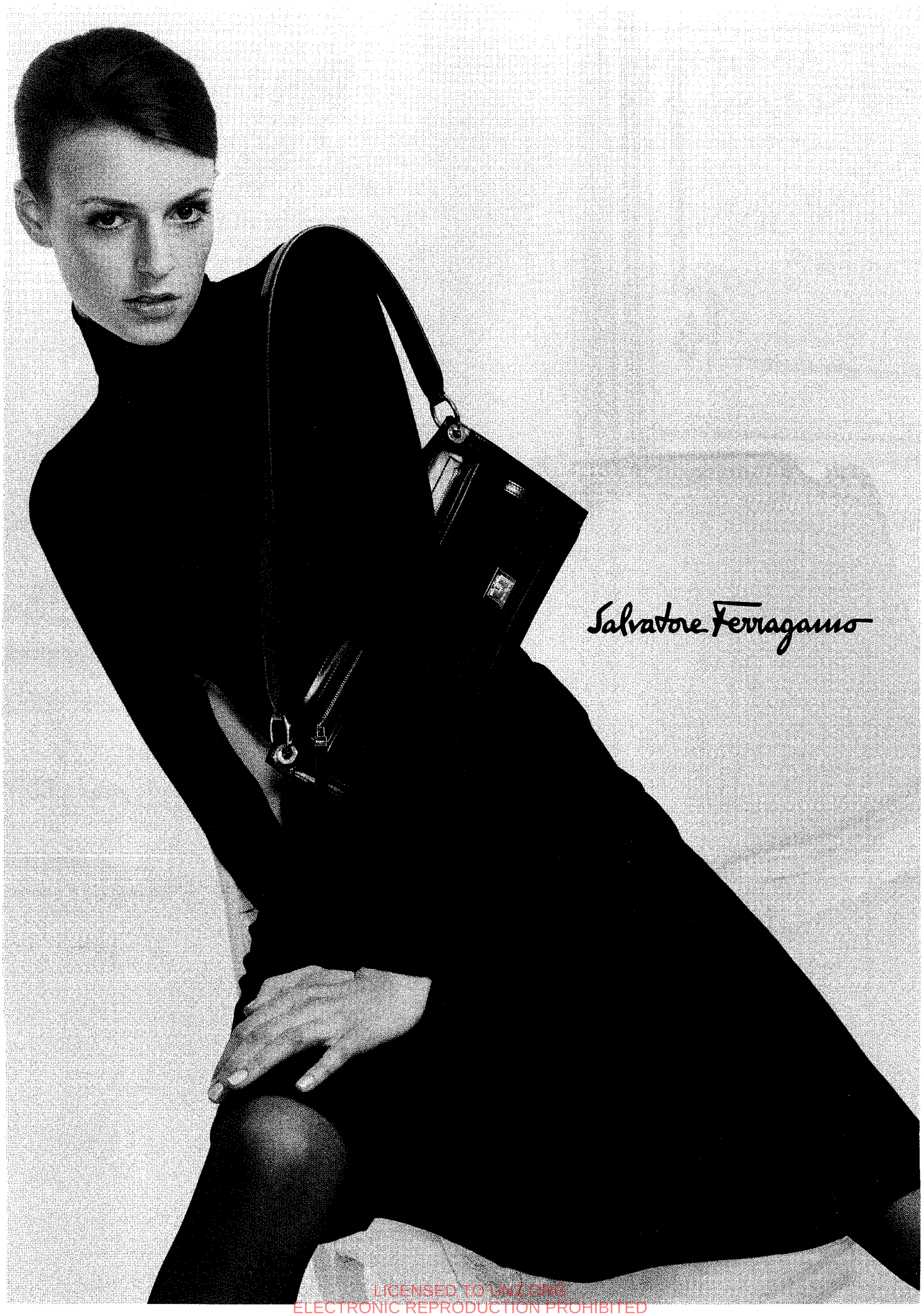
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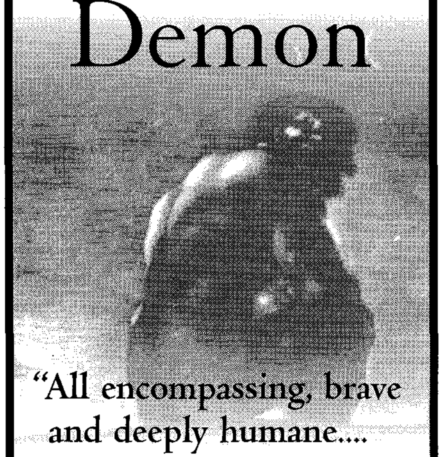

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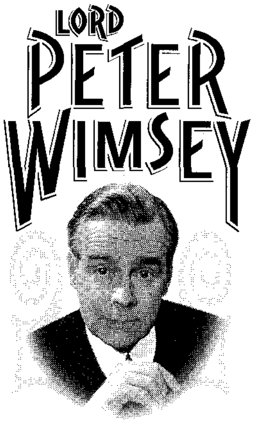

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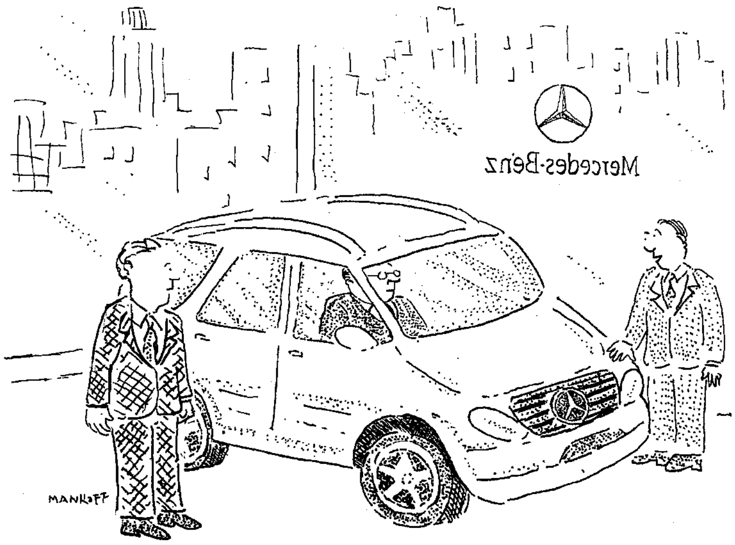
Tad Friend ("Comics from Underground," p. 28) recently published "Lost in Mongolia: Travels in Hollywood and Other Foreign Lands."

Gordon Grice ("Slice of Life," p. 36), the author of "The Red Hourglass," a book of essays, is working on a memoir, "Lightning in the Bone."

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 84) is a staff writer and a film critic for the magazine.

Mark Ulriksen (Cover) will publish a book of his illustrations, "The Completely and Totally True Book of Urban Legends," in the autumn. ♦



"Yep, the same one that's been in the news, but now it comes loaded with legal representation."

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THE MAIL

SECURITY AND TERROR

I cannot imagine sacrificing a child of mine for a greater cause, as the terrorist Abdullah Shami, of the Islamic Jihad, told Jeffrey Goldberg he would willingly do ("The Martyr Strategy," July 9th). But I also cannot imagine how I would respond to violence and systematic disenfranchisement of the kind that Palestinians experience daily. If men like Shami are part of the story, so is the Palestinian father whom television cameras captured, first cowering with his son under fire from Israeli soldiers, and then in anguish when he discovered that the child had not survived. Portraying Palestinians as wanton terrorists is not enough.
Ekene Okobi
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Goldberg leaves us to ponder the prospect of a father who hopes that his three-year-old will become a suicide bomber. One can't help but wonder why the suicide bombers never seem to come from the ranks of the top Palestinian politicians. Can it be that the leadership has a revived interest in directing the anger of the masses against the Jews because it has, since Oslo, proved itself incapable of providing a government without corruption, or an economy that allows a decent standard of living? It's an old tactic, and a sadly familiar one. There is no question that most of the victims of the conflict are Palestinian, but they are victims, above all, of their own inadequate leaders. Terrorism usually begins at home.
Jaime A. Alcabes
Oakland, Calif.

Goldberg describes how the voices of Palestinian moderates have been drowned out by those of extremists over the past ten months. In the same way and at the same time, Israeli public opinion has moved to the right, and expressions of concern for human rights have given way to a desire for one-sided security. Unfortunately for civilians in both Israel and the Occupied Territories, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (celebrated for his "iron fist") and Ahmed Jibril (the Palestinian "terrorist") have more similarities than differences. Goldberg could have made this clearer by exploring the heavy-handed use of force by the Israeli Army against ordinary Palestinians. For them, as for Israelis who live under the constant threat of violence, the sentiment that these men draw upon is not as incomprehensible as it may be for us in the safety of the United States.
Leila Kawar
New York City

Goldberg's report on Palestinian suicide bombers laid bare the ruthlessness and purposefulness of their operations. That the Israeli government has also been ruthless and purposeful does not excuse the Arab organizations. Whether it is the Basques in Spain, or either side in Northern Ireland, or the extremists in Algeria, the tactic of random killings is anathema to reasonable people. History, however, seems sometimes to reward violence, and sometimes not. What usually decides the outcome is the balance of justice between those who rule and those who are ruled. This is the standard that will, in the end, determine whether Israel should continue to occupy any parts of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.
J. Peter Flemming
Great Barrington, Mass.

AN IMPROPER PICASSO

The explicit drawing that accompanied the article on Picasso's erotic art was in poor taste. It was not appropriate, even if it is by Picasso. I expect better judgment from *The New Yorker.*
Walter Ebmeyer
King of Prussia, Pa.

●

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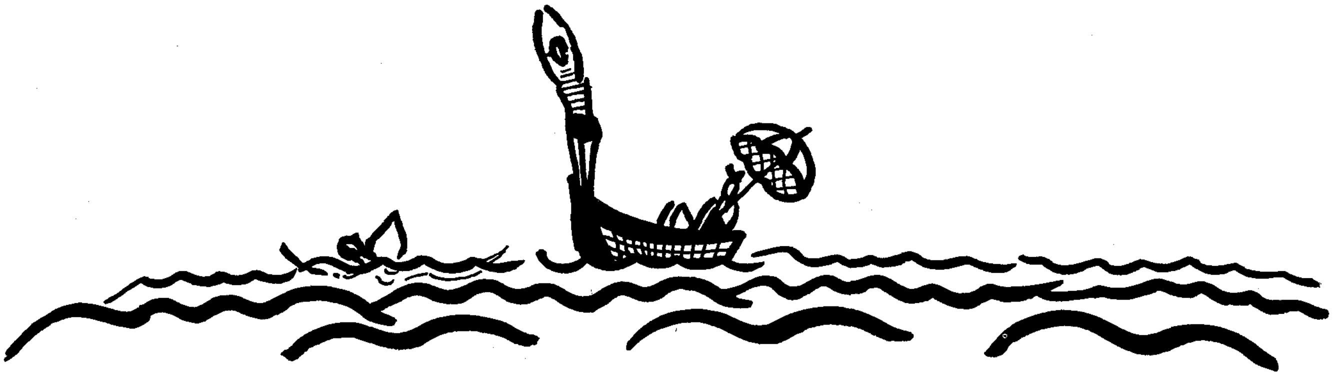

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

HELLO MUDDAH, HELLO FADDUH!
A musical by Doug Bernstein and Rob Krausz, inspired by the Allan Sherman song of the same name, which follows the relationship of a couple from their summer-camp days to retirement in Florida. In previews. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 239-6200.)

IF YOU EVER LEAVE ME, I'M GOING WITH YOU!
From the husband-and-wife comedy writers Renee Taylor and Joseph Bologna, a new play, about their thirty-six-year relationship. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

MR. PRESIDENT
Gerard Allesandrini has updated Irving Berlin's 1962 musical to reflect the current political scene. The show will run in repertory with Allesandrini's "Forbidden Broadway 2001: A Spoof Odyssey." In previews. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE SEAGULL
Mike Nichols directs John Goodman, Marcia Gay Harden, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Kevin Kline, Debra Monk, Larry Pine, Natalie Portman, Stephen Spinella, Meryl Streep, and Christopher Walken in Chekov's play, the second production in the New York Shakespeare Festival's outdoor season. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750.)

SHUT UP AND LOVE ME
An limited-run encore engagement of the performance artist Karen Finley's latest examination of sexuality. In previews. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG
Don Cheadle and Jeffrey Wright portray a pair of rivalrous brothers, Lincoln and Booth, in Suzan-Lori Parks's new comedy. Preview on July 25. Opens July 26 at 8. George C. Wolfe is the director. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM DIRECTING CABARET
The annual summer series presents two-night-only stagings of short works directed by emerging artists. The festival continues through Sept. 2. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL
A kind of "My Fair Bat Boy," in which a half-bat, half-man—memorably played by Deven May—emerges from his childhood cave into adult bourgeois life. But the musical world he enters is one of darkness, not light, of ironies, not idealism, where plot is a history of abdications and song extolls the emptiness of all the standard credos—Christianity, family, community, love, redemption—and of the musical form itself. It's a jejune vision, but a smart, playful, and funny one nonetheless. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/01.) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

BLAST!
A musical extravaganza, which evolved from the drum-and-bugle corps Star of Indiana. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

BLUE
In Charles Randolph-Wright's memory play, a trumpet player named Reuben Clark (Hill Harper) returns to his childhood in a small South Carolina town, where his family owns the only African-American funeral parlor, run by his beautiful, narcissistic, upwardly mobile mother, Peggy (Phylicia Rashad). Unfortunately, Reuben's entire transition to manhood—his leaving home, his rejection of the trumpet, his therapy, and his final coming to terms with his mother—takes place offstage. What we are left with is a patina of literacy and boulevard lyricism but no internal life. (7/9/01) (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

BLUE WINDOW
The always strong Marin Hinkle is the center of this production of Craig Lucas's 1984 ensemble piece. Ms. Hinkle's character has suffered a tragedy (we discover at the end) but has recovered enough to nervously throw a dinner party for a mismatched assortment of guests, played by a strong cast. The best moments come during the cocktail conversation, which is funny and highlights social awkwardness and isolation. In the end, the show gives no more than a flicker of hope that the clever and sensitive among us will find peace, but it's well played. (28th Street Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 206-1515. Closes July 28.)

CHAUCER IN ROME
The latest play by John Guare, set in Italy during the final year of the last millennium. Nicholas Martin is the director. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes July 29.)

DOWN SOUTH
In a comedy by Doug Field, the Rattlestick Theatre takes aim at the Cuban-missile crisis. (224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 239-6200. Closes July 29.)

42ND STREET
As a domineering diva who breaks her ankle before the big opening night, the wonderful Christine Ebersole steals the show in this revival of the 1980 tap musical based on the 1933 film. But it has to be said: it was probably easy to do. As the young chorine who steps in to save the day, Kate Levering doesn't have enough star power to shine above the legions of hoofers who crowd the stage, and Michael Cumpsty, as the gruff director, is sorely miscast. Still, if this sort of show is your cup of tea, the songs are wonderful and the dancing is fine—just know that the cup is not quite full. (Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

FOUR
Knowing that this play by the twenty-five-year-old Christopher Shinn was originally produced in London makes the setting exotic. It's the Fourth of July, 1996, in Hartford, Connecticut, and two couples are getting together—a white gay teen-ager with an older, married black man he met on the Internet, and the man's daughter with a white kid who plays basketball. The characters are sharp, but mostly too young (the married man notwithstanding) for their problems to be consistently interesting; their relationships are involving without being satisfying, both for them and for the audience. The actors, however, under the direction of Jeff Cohen, are excellent. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515.)

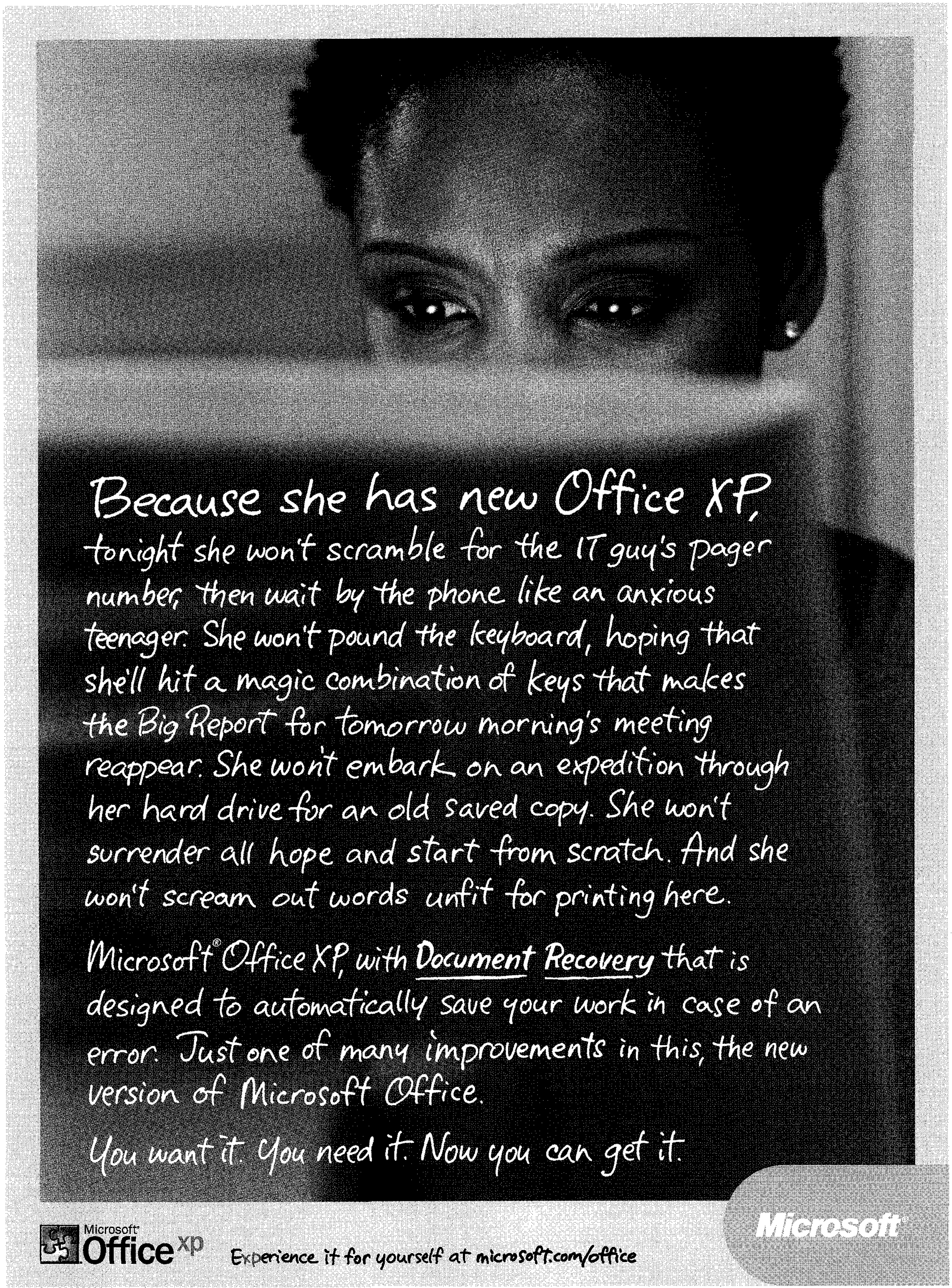
GEORGE GERSHWIN ALONE
A one-man portrait with music, written and performed by Hershey Felder and directed by Joel Zwick. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

HAROLD PINTER FESTIVAL
Lincoln Center's summer shindig includes stagings of the playwright's dramas by Dublin's Gate Theatre and by London's Almeida Theatre. Continues through July 29. (For information about shows and venues, call 875-5928.)

HAZELLE GOODMAN: ON EDGE
The actress and comedienne portrays multiple urban characters in her latest one-woman show. July 30 at 8:30. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
Outdoor repertory performances of "The Merchant of Venice" and "Romeo and Juliet," both directed by Terrence O'Brien. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 845-265-9575.)

I SING!
A musical comedy about postgraduate life in New York City, by Eli Bolin, Sam Forman, and Benjamin Salka. (Maverick, 307 W. 26th St. 239-6200.)



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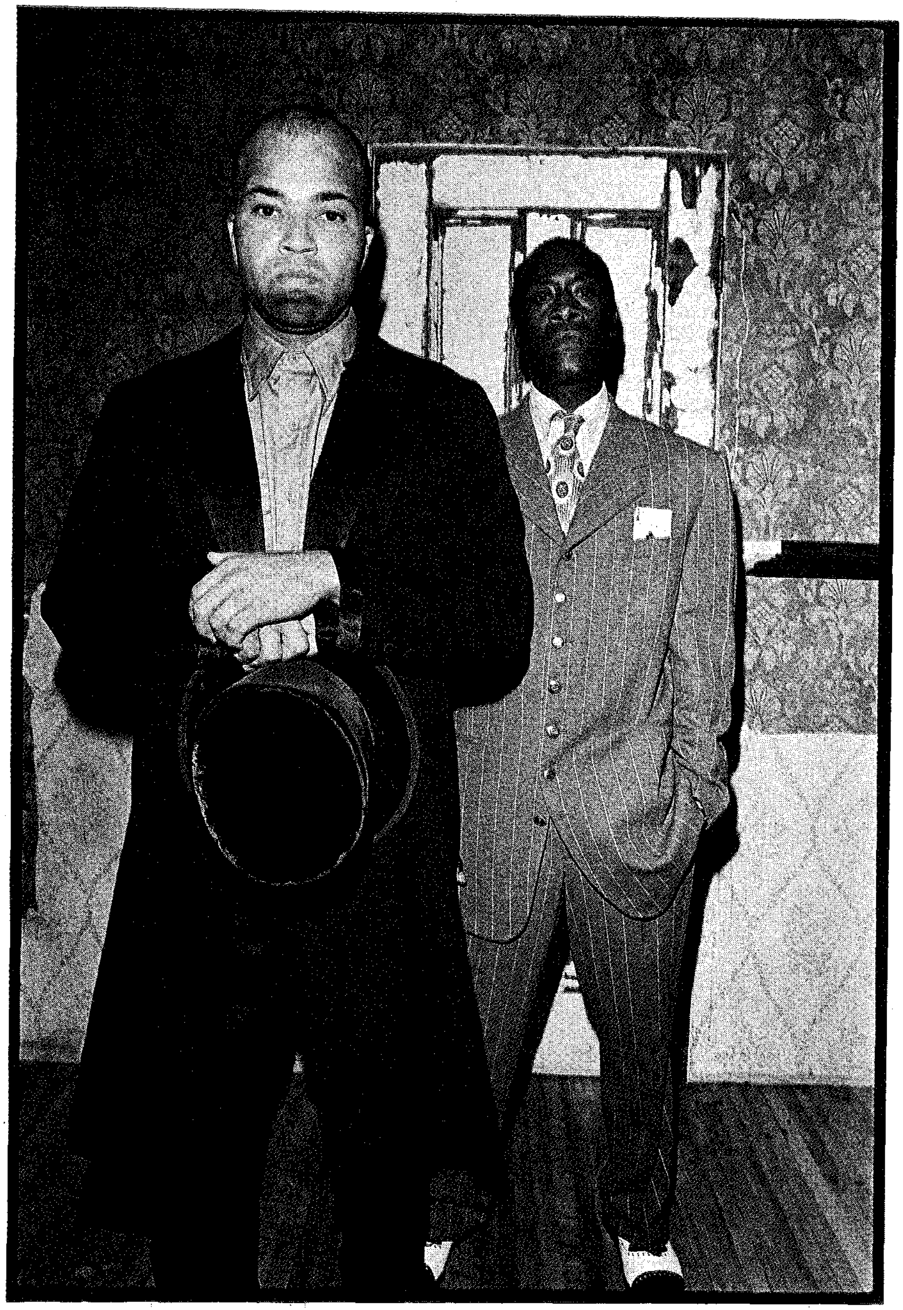


Jeffrey Wright and Don Cheadle, in "Topdog/Underdog," by Suzan-Lori Parks.

KIKI & HERB: STOP, DROP & ROLL
The drag duo otherwise known as Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman, in their latest show. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680. Closes July 29.)

A LIFE
Fritz Weaver portrays an Irish civil servant nearing the end of his life, in Hugh Leonard's 1981 play. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

LOBBY HERO
In another era, the contrivances of Kenneth Lonergan's new play would have been called hokum. But because Lonergan is the writer and director of the moving and successful film "You Can Count on Me" and the author of the acclaimed plays "This Is Our Youth" and "The Waverly Gallery" the public is expecting him to aim high. He does, and misses. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

LOVE, JANIS
A musical play about Janis Joplin, built around her songs, writings, and interviews. Though it contains no new insight, it's a useful corrective to the drunken, drug-addicted legend, and the production is a fine one. Randal Myler directed with a sure eye for the telling detail, and the seven-member band really cooks. (Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

MAJOR BARBARA
Cherry Jones has the title role in a Roundabout Theatre Company production of Shaw's play. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
The Aquila Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's comedy, set in London in the sixties. (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 529-4530.)

MUSIC FROM A SPARKLING PLANET
A new comedy by Douglas Carter Beane ("As Bees in Honey Drown"). (Reviewed in this issue.) (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
Dale Wasserman's severely dated adaptation of Ken Kesey's 1962 novel—a broad allegory, set in a mental hospital, about the perils of nonconformity—is a quaint relic, but as staged by Chicago's excellent Steppenwolf Theatre it's a well-acted one. Gary Sinise leads the cast, as the incorrigible psychiatric patient Randle P. McMurphy. Terry Kinney is the director. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY
In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic performances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

THE PRODUCERS
High-camp heaven from Mel Brooks, who wrote the music and the lyrics for this monster-hit version of his 1968 movie—in which two scoundrels try to bilk their investors by staging a surefire failure, entitled "Springtime for Hitler." The performing centerpiece of the show is Nathan Lane, as the flamboyant huckster Max Bialystock; his kind of high-amperage panache is in limited supply these days, and both he and the excellent Matthew Broderick, as the hapless accountant Leo Bloom, deliver the mail. Expertly staged by Susan Stroman. (5/7/01) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

SAINT LUCY'S EYES
Ruby Dee portrays a back-room abortionist in civil-rights-era Memphis, in an encore staging of Bridgette A. Wimberly's drama. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

SLANGUAGE
Poetry, jazz, hip-hop, politics, the blues, and boleros are all a part of the latest work by the Bronx troupe known as Universes. Jo Bonney is the director. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

STONES IN HIS POCKETS
Marie Jones's play is set in an Irish village where a big-budget Hollywood movie is being made. Conleth Hill and Seán Campion play two extras in the movie and all thirteen other characters as well. Though the play has its clever ways when it comes to sending up both Hollywood and Irish mores, the stories told here aren't anything you haven't seen before. (4/16/01) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SUMMER CAMP 7
SoHo Rep's annual festival of new works written and directed by emerging artists. July 25-28: "The Communist Dracula Pageant," written by Anne Washburn and directed by Stephen Cosson. The series continues through Aug. 12. (46 Walker St. 479-7979.)

A THOUSAND CLOWNS
Tom Selleck is the eccentric Murray Burns, in a revival of Herb Gardner's 1962 comedy. John Rando is the director. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

TICK, TICK . . . BOOM!
The title represents the author Jonathan Larson's fear of time running out on his musical dreams, but it also plays as a spooky reminder that time did run out on him. (He died, at thirty-five, of an aortic aneurysm, just after the dress rehearsal of "Rent," his sprawling musical.) It's set on the eve of the composer's thirtieth birthday—his Walpurgisnacht—as he is caught between the pressures to succeed and to settle. Larson's ambition was to marry rock and roll to an up-to-the-minute Broadway-musical form, and this show, which has an orchestra of four and a slick, hard-working cast of three, shows him trying to adjust his goals to economic reality. Well directed by Scott Schwartz, and with Larson's plotline deftly reworked by David Auburn, it has a fetching modesty, and shows off Larson's idiosyncrasy, energy, and promise. What remains unresolved is whether he could have built on his lyric gifts to tell a proper story. Still, as a miniature testament to the ructions of his fervent heart, "Tick, Tick . . . Boom" has sinew and a winning sweetness. (7/9/01) (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

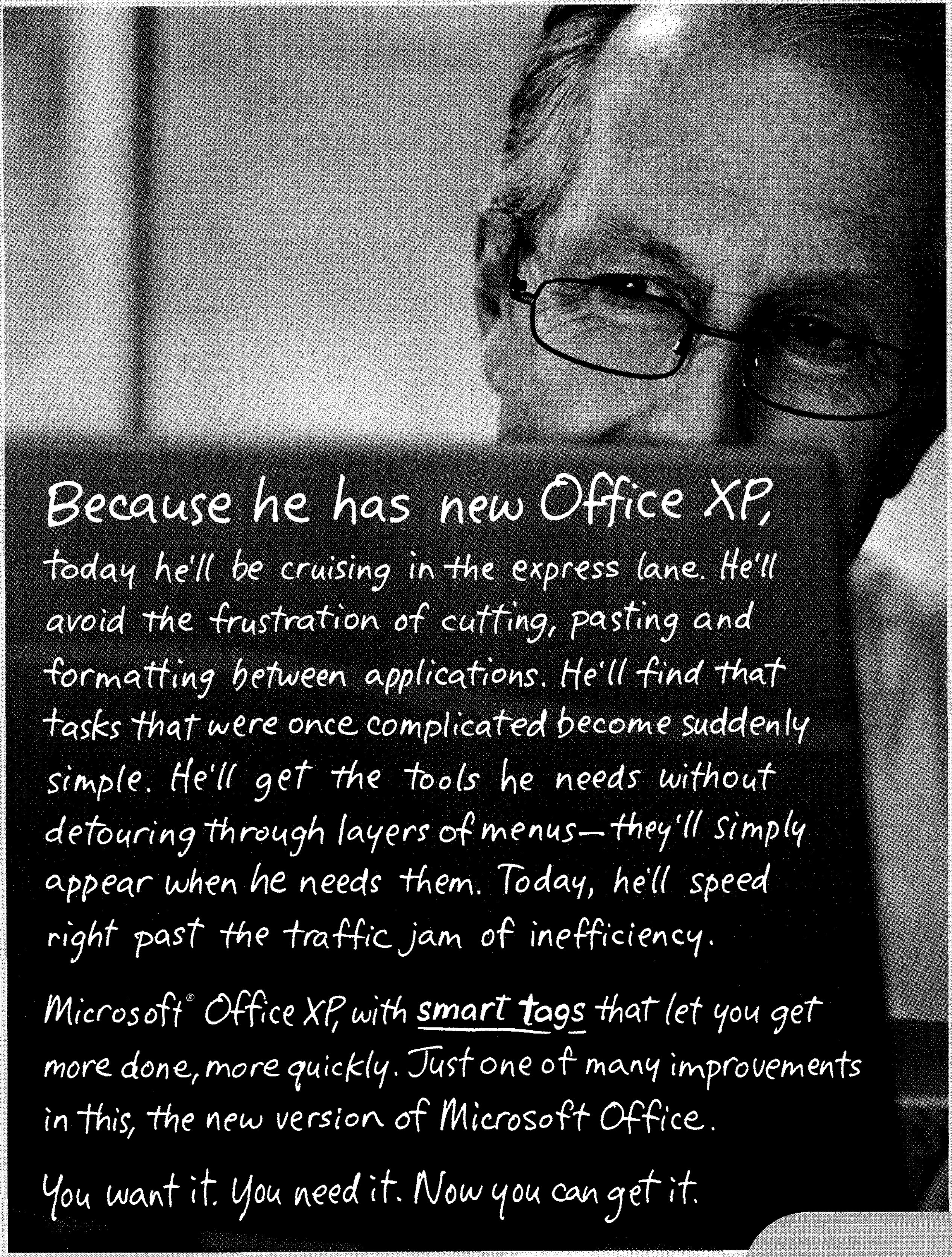
AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

BRUCE GILDEN / MAGNUM



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Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.
THE DINNER PARTY
Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

J. Smith-Cameron, in "Music from a Sparkling Planet," by Douglas Carter Beane.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.
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Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.
KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.
PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.
THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.
THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.
THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

COMPAÑÍA NACIONAL DE DANZA
The Lincoln Center Festival presents the Madrid-based company in an evening-length work, "Bach: Multiplicity," choreographed by Nacho Duato and set to a grab bag of Bach. (New York State Theatre. 721-6500. July 25-28 at 8.)

PILOBOLUS
The storied company, whose directorate (Robby Barnett, Alison Chase, Jonathan Wolken, Michael Tracy) is nearly the same size as the troupe (which is always, in every incarnation, six), closes its month of performances with three programs, each of which offers a new work. The three premières are "Davenen," which considers prayer in various highly active forms, set to a score by the Klezmatics; "Monkey and the White Bone Demon," based on a sixteenth-century Buddhist novel; and the obliquely erotic duet "Symbiosis." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. July 23-27 at 8 and July 28 at 2 and 8.)

DANCES FOR WAVE HILL
Wave Hill's alfresco dance series offers site-specific works created for the twenty-eight-acre garden by Zvi Gotheiner & Dancers, Monica Bill Barnes, and Potri Ranka Manis and her troupe, Kinding Sindaw. (Wave Hill, 675 W. 252nd St., the Bronx. 718-549-3200. July 25 at 6:30.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Six months ago, the choreographer Maia Claire Garrison had a vision in which "all was sedate / I had to concentrate / Cogitate my fate / Suddenly I felt / Someplace between subspace and grace." Out there in subspace, she discovered a new persona, rhymer M.C. Fortress, to spread a new message; namely, "Brainwash yourself in a positive way." She hopes this message will eventually take the form of a CD, a music video, a film short, and a work of literature. Right now, it's just a trippy musical—a family affair with New Age rhyming by Fortress, live vocals by sister Joy, acrobatic hip-hop dancing by the choreographer's troupe M'Zawa Danz (who are not strictly family), a light-jazz score by brother Matthew, and one gorgeous, rumbly tune by the rhymer's father, the late Jimmy Garrison, who served as John Coltrane's bassist for many years. Full Circle Productions rounds out the evening with "Front Line," a piece that combines elements of early hip-hop, such as break dancing and graffiti. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. No tickets necessary. June 27 at 8:30.)

"CROSS-POLLINATION"
Three choreographers share a program that includes Sally Schuiling's "Milkweed," a duet with a rock drummer; Maia Ramnath's "Om Shakti Shakti Om," which considers traditional duties of South Asian women; and Rachel Cohen's take on the cocktail party, "Metropolitan Crawl." (Merce Cunningham Theatre, 55 Bethune St. 917-371-9152. July 27 at 9 and July 28 at 8.)

MERIÁN SOTO DANCE AND PERFORMANCE
The choreographer presents two works: "Puerto Rican Trivia," from 1986, which satirizes the era's identity politics; and "Pelea de Gallos (Cockfight)," which turns the blood sport into a pas de deux for a man and a woman. (BAAD!, 841 Barretto St., the Bronx. 718-842-5223. July 28 at 8 and July 29 at 3 and 8.)

"RIVERDANCE—ON BROADWAY"
Not the Lord of the Dance with his shirt off and the leather truss. The other one. (Gershwin Theatre, 222 W. 51st St. 307-4100. July 25 and July 28 at 2 and 8, July 26-27 and July 31 at 8, and July 29 at 3. Through Aug. 26.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
July 24-27 at 8, July 28 at 2 and 8, and July 29 at 2: The Mark Morris Dance Group. ♦ July 26-27 at 8:15, July 28 at 2:15 and 8:15, and July 29 at 5: Ann Carlson in "Night Light." (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

LAURA CANTRELL / JOE FLOOD
The singer-songwriter (and host of WFMU's Saturday-afternoon show "Radio Thrift Shop") shares the bill with another cornerstone of the local roots-rock scene. (World Trade Center Plaza. No tickets necessary. July 25 at 6.)

"JAZZ IN JULY"
The annual uptown improvisational get-together closes out the month with a pair of concerts. July 25: Keyboardists reign at Dick Hyman and Derek Smith's annual piano party as Neville Dickie and Dena DeRose join these two venerated stylists. Still, room has been made for other flavorful instrumentalists, including the clarinettist Kenny Davern, the saxophonist Jerry Jerome, and the singing bassist Jay Leonhart. ♦ July 26: Stride piano is as American as fried chicken and hot dogs, but that hasn't stopped European players from joining in on the knuckle-busting fun. Neville Dickie (England), Bernd Lhotsky (Germany), and Louis Mazetier (France) join our own Dick Hyman for a night of outsized piano playing. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. All shows at 8.)

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
The final week of dancing under the stars at Lincoln Center. July 26: The Cajun quartet **Charivari** gets a little help from the veteran fiddler **Michael Doucet**. Rounding out this bill of Louisiana music is the powerful combo **Nathan and the Zydeco Cha Chas.** ♦ July 27: Congolese rumba with **Papa Wemba and Viva la Musica.** ♦ July 28: **Illinois Jacquet**. Every chance to hear the great tenor saxophonist Jacquet should be grabbed; his wide-as-Texas tone and melodic eloquence is matched by a bull-out-of-the-pen exuberance. (Fountain Plaza. 875-5766. Dancing starts at 8; lessons are offered at 6:30.)

BON JOVI
Despite some slight tonsorial changes and the eponymous lead singer's relatively new acting career, the song remains largely the same for this group of New Jersey pop-metal veterans. And although the band has discarded a few of the genre trappings that would otherwise brand its music as dated, Bon Jovi's anthems remain firmly entrenched in the middle of the road. With the com-

paratively radical Sugar Ray opening. (Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. July 27-28 at 8.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
New York City's favorite free outdoor concert series continues. July 28 at 3: **Kid Creole and the Coconuts** started partying more than twenty years ago, and they aren't about to stop now. With the San Francisco barrio rockers **Los Mocosos.** ♦ July 29 at 3: An afternoon of soca with the Trinidadian headliners **Shadow** and **Super Blue.** (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 360-2777.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—July 26: A night of reggae with the British-born Rastafarian **Maxi Priest** and the Kingston native **Gregory Isaacs,** the Cool Ruler himself. July 27-28: The Springsteen cronies **Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—July 26-27: Practicing a purposely crude brand of lo-fi electronic music paired with a predilection for overtly lurid subject matter (song titles include "Diddle My Skittle" and "Cum Undun"), the sexually assertive Canadian performer **Peaches** (a.k.a. Merill Nisker) has created a name for herself by burying the needle on the lewd-o-meter at every opportunity. The end results can be construed as alternately titillating and refreshing or confrontational and empty, depending on your disposition.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—July 31: **Buckcherry** flaunts its influences like a shiny badge. This troop of gangly L.A. party boys clearly grew up on a steady diet of Bon Scott-era AC/DC and Guns 'n' Roses. While this is hardly an original format, the band's hook-laden paeans to getting loud, laid, and loaded are executed with such zealous rancor that it's hard to fault them for it. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—July 26: Gritty Irish rock with the **Prodigals.** July 27: **Rocket from the Crypt,** a six-piece San Diego ensemble complete with sparkling horns and matching greasers-from-Hell rockabilly outfits, comes on like a glittery Vegas floor show. Despite their tongue-in-cheek sheen, they deliver a powerful punch with a bonus dose of vintage R. & B. panache.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—July 25: **Eliza Carthy,** the daughter of the British folk legends Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson. The twenty-five-year-old fiddler, singer, and songwriter has blue-streaked hair and a pierced nose, and favors chunky-soled boots. Her music is a mix of tradition and more up-to-date fashions. July 26: **Si*Sé** is a downtown electronica collective led by the enchanting vocalist Carol C. The band mixes Latin rhythms and an urban sensibility into a potently intoxicating cocktail.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—July 27: Brooklyn's **Barbez** binds together *musette*, tango, punk, and klezmer to create Brecht-flecked café rock for sophisticated audiences. A small, potent Russian singer and an exquisite violinist (along with the occasional guest cellist and a dancer) add to the dramatic resonance.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—July 26: While some simply cite the **Troggs'** garage-rock chestnut "Wild Thing" as their greatest contribution to rock 'n' roll, legend has it that an oft-bootlegged recording of the band members engaged in a remarkably dimwitted argument in the studio was the inspiration for the seminal mockumentary "This Is Spinal Tap."

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Burning Desires

John Willoughby is a charcoal snob. "Oh, don't say snob. Say devotee. Say enthusiast," the lanky co-author of "The Thrill of the Grill" and "License to Grill" says as he stands in the barbecue department of **BED BATH & BEYOND** (620 Sixth Ave.; 255-3550) and curls his lip, in the nicest possible way, at a Weber Silver B Genesis gas grill ($450). "I understand that gas is convenient, but it's just not as much fun," he says. "After all, the best thing about grilling is that it's so primitive. You get to play with fire!" He takes a second look at the Genesis. "If you must go with gas, this isn't bad. It's got a fair degree of power, so you can char the food, and a drainage place underneath, which a lot of the cheaper grills don't have. And it's got a thermometer. Another thing a lot of them don't have is a gas gauge, so you can't tell when you're running low. This does."

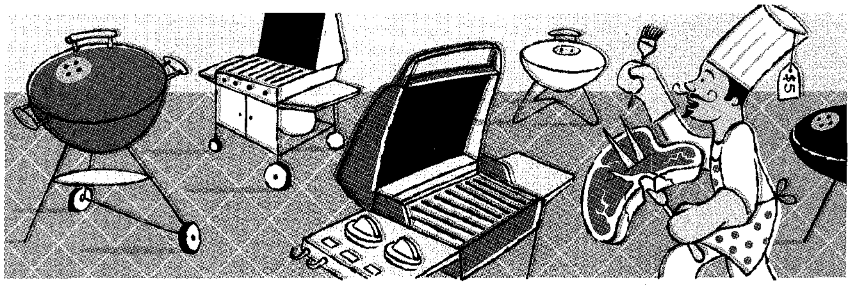
Willoughby, who recently moved to Manhattan from Boston, isn't doing a lot of outdoor grilling these days, since it's difficult to do so legally in the city. "It's the worst thing about New York," he says, then moves on to a few other things that are making him sad, like a George Foreman electric grill ("I love George, but this thing isn't even a grill. It's a waffle iron") or tongs that aren't spring-loaded ("Tongs are essential—they're an extra pair of hands that don't burn"). Though there's a wall of whisks and brushes, Willoughby is less than impressed. "Sure, you need a wire brush for cleaning—fish, especially, sticks to the grill—but it's better to buy this stuff at the local hardware store. Just get a paint scraper!" And the electric thermometer meat fork doesn't impress him. "Who wants something more complicated than an instant read?"

Gas is also king at **KRUP'S KITCHEN AND BATH** (11 W. 18th St.; 243-5787), a showroom with a mammoth steel Thermador grill ($2,400) that has built-in worktables, an elaborate rotisserie rack, and so much juice you can't even use it inside unless you own a restaurant. Its polar opposite in size and strength, an odd little number by Magma which looks like a cross between Sputnik and a soda-fountain stool ($489), is so appealing it gives even the anti-gasman Willoughby pause.

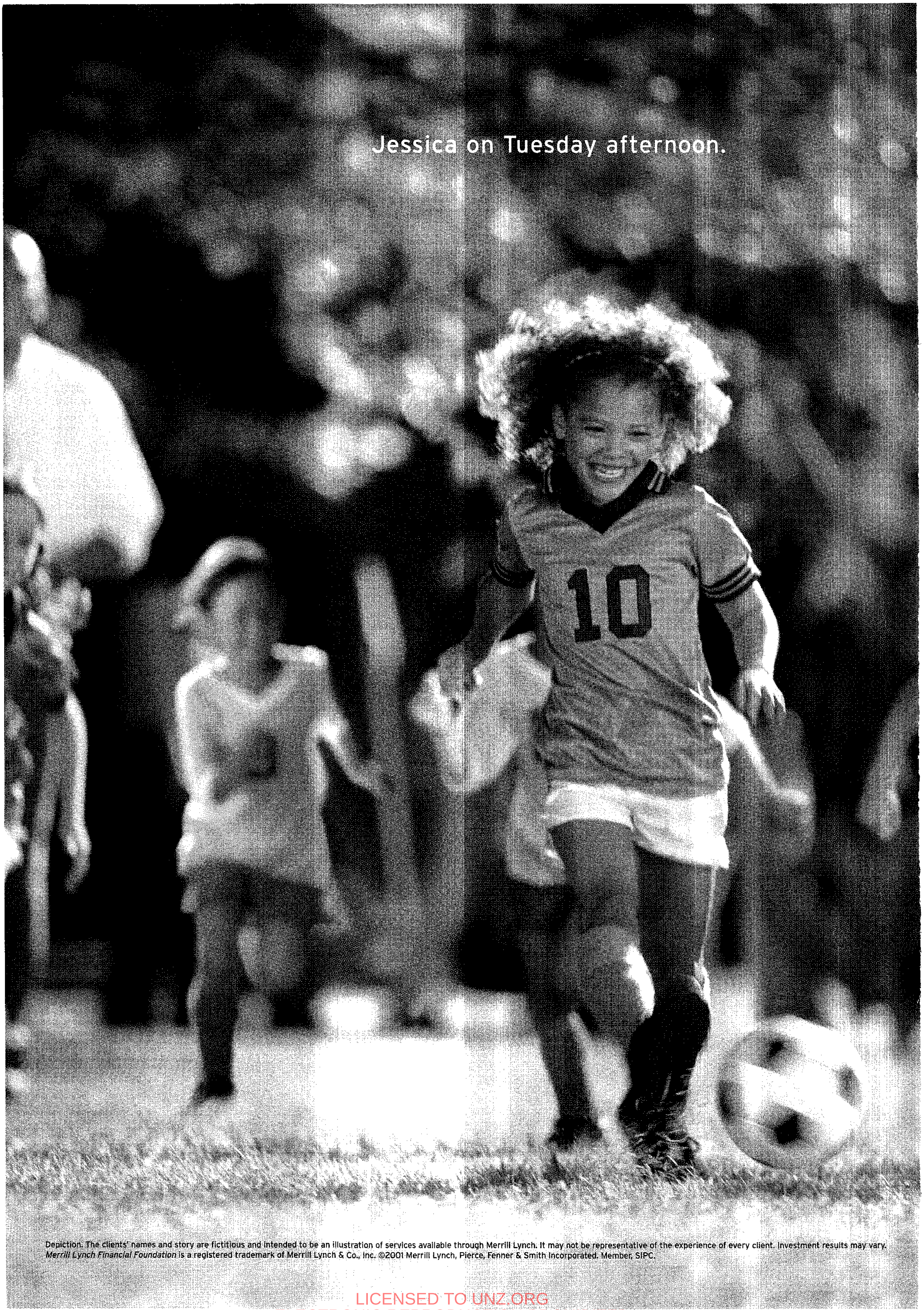
At **GRACIOUS HOME** (1992 Broadway; 579-9957), a compromise between gas and charcoal finally turns up: the Weber Performer, with a gas ignition whose sole function is to get the coals lit ($430). The store has plenty of other stuff that Willoughby thinks is okay: waterproof add-on lights for night cooking, oversized spatulas, packages of Chef Harvey's bamboo skewers. A tiny cast-iron grill made by Lodge Manufacturing, just the right size for a fire escape, should the law change, strikes Willoughby as pretty cute, though it lacks a cover. ("No cover, no chicken.") And there is a Weber here which Willoughby gives an unqualified rave: the 22.5-inch One-Touch Gold charcoal grill ($140) with extra-large ash catcher and flip-up grate, so you can add more charcoal without looking around for the spring-loaded tongs.

Just as he is about to leave, Willoughby spots an item that looks like a metal can with the top and bottom cut off. "Oh, this is neat!" he says, gazing raptly at a Weber chimney starter ($17), an item that is de rigueur for all real grillers. Shoving newspaper and charcoal in a metal tube and setting the whole business on fire, it turns out, is the very essence of summer fun. "Oh, this is a great tool," Willoughby says. "Just great!"

—*Lynn Yaeger*



EDEL RODRIGUEZ


Jessica on Tuesday afternoon.

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Jessica's trust fund on Tuesday afternoon.

MERRILL LYNCH FINANCIAL ADVISOR PATRICIA BRUNSON

While Jessica takes an afternoon off to focus on scoring goals, her parents' Financial Advisor at Merrill Lynch focuses on meeting her family's goals. She helped them craft a comprehensive financial plan called Merrill Lynch Financial Foundation,® which covers their entire financial life – from stocks and bonds to tax strategies, 401(k)s, college funds and mortgages. They established their risk profile, goals and future scenarios to determine their needs going forward. Thanks to Merrill's interactive modeling tools, they can review their holdings and adjust their portfolio as their needs change or in times of volatility. This is how Merrill simplifies the Chappells' life. How can we simplify yours?

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JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—July 26-28: **Ray Barretto and New World Spirit.** Barretto is a *congero* for all seasons; his neo-salsa bands invariably have the New York mix in just the right proportions—two pinches of Latin to one of jazz and a dusting of funk. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—July 24-25: The **David S. Ware** quartet. The prodigious tenor saxophonist Ware may not have recorded for a major label for long, but how many unadulterated avant-garde jazz players ever have? As long as Ware has his longtime cohorts, the pianist Matthew Shipp and the bassist William Parker, with him he's fully prepared to generate a mighty sound. July 26-29: The **Oscar Peterson** quartet. At the peak of his powers, essentially the four decades from the fifties through the eighties, Peterson often sounded like four pianists at once. Illness in the nineties left him impaired—now he sounds like only two. With his whirlwind technique and pile-driving swing, Peterson represents, for most of America, mainstream jazz piano.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through July 29: The **Nicholas Payton** quintet. Although he's yet to make a defining recording that matches his extravagant gifts as a trumpeter—his masterpiece remains his 1993 encounter with the nonagenarian hornman Doc Cheatham—Payton can still raise the temperature of a club with his careening improvisations. That he can also melt hearts with his honeyed tone on a ballad is the icing on an already rich cake. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—July 29: The **Howard Fishman** quartet. Led by the guitarist and singer Fishman, a Connecticut native who spent his musically formative years in New Orleans, this quartet spins out an eclectic mix of top-notch small-group swing and early American folk.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—July 26: **Sam Newsome and Global Unity.** Once a hard-bopping tenor saxophonist who was best known for his stint in Terence Blanchard's band, Newsome made an abrupt change in 1996 and began concentrating solely on the soprano saxophone, infused with a world-music sensibility. Mainstream jazz's loss is eclecticism's gain.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through July 29: The **Steve Wilson** quartet. Having come through on the substantial promise he showed with, among many others, Leon Parker and Chick Corea, the poised alto saxophonist and flute player Wilson has elbowed past trustworthy-sideman status straight into the big leagues. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis and Roussel, 1890-1930,"** which traces the careers of the four post-Impressionist painters, is the visual equivalent of a beach book. But it's more Jackie Collins than Tom Clancy. The imagery these artists preferred—cozy interiors, cavorting poodles, outings at the beach—looks far from radical today, but in fin-de-siècle France the infusion of art into everyday life was groundbreaking. Much of the work was commissioned for private homes; a pair of torchères designed by Lucien Levy-Dhurer flanking the entrance signals the decorative, domestic theme. (In a similar but misguided strategy, the gallery walls are painted in murky period colors: oxblood and deep teal.) Of the four artists, Vuillard fares best. Though his compact, mosaiclike brushwork can cloy, in a painting like "Window Overlooking the Woods," a sweeping view of the French countryside, it takes on the knotty magic of a tapestry. Through Sept. 9. ♦ **"Summer Selections: American Landscape Drawings and Watercolors."** Nearly fifty summer landscapes and seascapes—all works on paper by American artists—are tucked away in the cozy mezzanine galleries of the American Wing. Maurice Prendergast conveys the simple pleasures of a seaside stroll in a jaunty watercolor of nineteenth-century day-trippers. On a darker note, Thomas Cole's fastidious drawing "The Wounded Indian Slaking His Death-Thirst" pits the eternity of nature against the fragility of life, as massive boulders and contorted trees dwarf the tiny stooping figure. Frequent visitors to the museum will get a kick out of Frederick Arthur Bridgman's studies of the Temple of Dendur, portrayed against a view of Egypt as opposed to the familiar one of Central Park. Through Sept. 2. ♦ **"Dancing on the Roof: Photography and the Bauhaus (1923-29)"** focusses on the work of László Moholy-Nagy and his students at the Weimar haven for artistic experiment. Through Aug. 26. ♦ Sculptures by Joel Shapiro, on the roof. Through late fall. ♦ With a consort of starstruck press and film clips and more than eighty original outfits, **"Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years"** reminds viewers of the almost brash propriety of the "Jackie look." Through July 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An antidote to Gehry fever, the first half of the Mies van der Rohe extravaganza has opened with "Mies in Berlin." Matching its subject's famous simplicity, the show is a calmly paced bildungsroman, tracing a thirty-year progression from Schinkelesque prodigy to modernist master. Understandably, the show's curators, Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll, worried that canonical projects like the Tughendot House and the Barcelona Pavilion might seem too familiar. Their decision to freshen things up with Thomas Ruff's cloying colorized photographs is the show's only lapse. Otherwise, it's easy to fall under the spell of Mies's planar vision, his integration of landscape and garden design (more suited to a Californian than a Germanic climate), and his infectious love of *betonte Leere*, or heightened emptiness. A complementary show (at the Whitney) picks up where this one leaves off, with Mies's arrival in the United States in 1938. Through Sept. 11. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—At Frank Gehry's first retrospective, at the Whitney in 1986, undulant titanium roofs and wriggling walls were nowhere in sight. The Los Angeles-based architect seemed a quirky regional figure, fond of unorthodox materials (cardboard, chain-link fencing) and given to chopping projects into multiple room-size buildings. Nobody could have predicted that he would soon be the world's most sought-after and publicized architect. This new, profoundly exhilarating show tracks Gehry's path to Bilbao, and offers working models of current projects in Scotland, Germany, Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. It's too much to absorb in a single visit, but even a quick walk-through will leave visitors delighted, buoyed, amazed—and a little nostalgic for the plumb-line architecture that Gehry's fluid, crumpling planes seem poised to supplant. Through Aug. 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—For his first New York retrospective, Wayne Thiebaud's career has been served up in four courses, beginning with dessert. During his pastry period, Thiebaud turned cafeteria fare—not just wedges of cake and pie but a whole alphabet of prepared foods—into something enduringly wry and lovely, a celebration of everyday artifice. The stiff and studied portraits that follow are the show's weakest moment, but Thiebaud returns to form in the subsequent cityscapes and farmland scenes, creating steep, unapologetic Arcadias. There are echoes of Hopper, Diebenkorn, and Johns throughout, but none of Thiebaud's predecessors have his cool, confectionary jauntiness. Through Sept. 23. ♦ **"Mies in America,"** the larger of the companion exhibitions on the onetime Bauhaus director, shows how the architect's work evolved after his arrival here in 1938, from European avant-gardism to an increasingly space-age take on American practicality. Through Sept. 23. ♦ The Tower of Babel has nothing on the Whitney this month, as Joseph Grigely transforms the lobby gallery into a chapel of white noise. The artist became deaf at the age of ten, and conducts conversations with non-signers through notes scribbled by them on scraps of paper. Grigely can speak, so we read only one side of the dialogue, ranging from a series of chitchat non sequiturs ("loud wind now" followed by "Wim Wenders, too") to emphatic declarations ("I want 10%"). More than twenty-five hundred of these scraps are installed floor to ceiling in the oval space, the visual equivalent of a drone. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Discovery Room, a hands-on educational program

TABLES FOR TWO

BLUE RIBBON
97 Sullivan St. (274-0404)—First there was Blue Ribbon, then Blue Ribbon Sushi a few doors down, Blue Ribbon Bakery in the West Village, and now Blue Ribbon Brooklyn. What next—Blue Ribbon Larchmont?

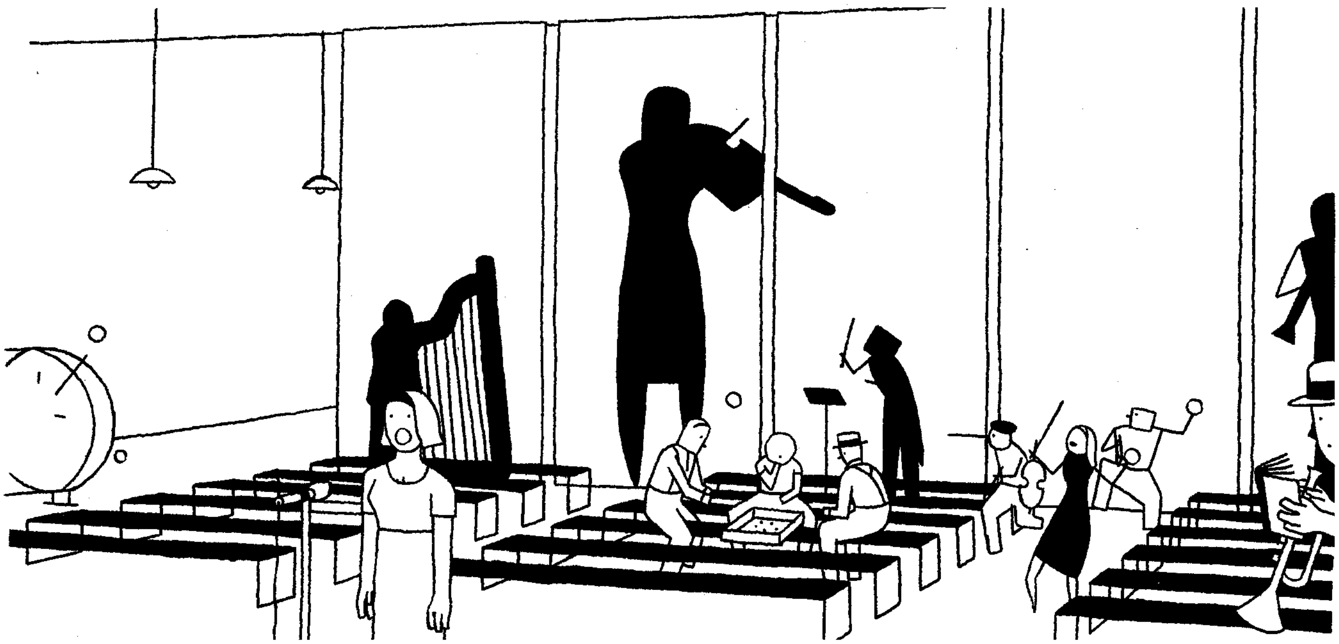
Now seems like a good time to reëxamine the success of the Bromberg brothers, Bruce and Eric, who grew up in New Jersey and studied at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. More than eight years after the original Blue Ribbon's opening, just about everybody knows it as the spot that chefs head for after closing down their own kitchens (it's open until 4 A.M.). Once there, they squeeze into the small front room for a snack from the raw bar, or join the line (no reservations for fewer than five) to be escorted into the slightly larger dining area, packed with a sexy late-night crowd.

But the best time to judge the place by its food is in the early evening, when the sun is still shining through the large front window, the noise level is still pleasant (turns out they play terrific music), and the waiters are hanging around the kitchen door in the back, just waiting for someone to wait on.

Blue Ribbon is an Americanized version of the serious bistros the Brombergs modelled it on. Expertly made dishes are served in the studied dowdy elegance of a single room that's been painted cream and maroon, with perpetually dusty-looking floors, paper-topped tables so small that everyone bumps knees, and menus too big by half. The menu has to be big to hold the eighty-plus eclectic favorites. And yet it's neither overwhelming nor diffuse. None of the items are loaded down with windbag descriptions of ingredients or preparation details. It's inviting, straightforward food that speaks for itself: shrimp cocktail, fried oysters, beef marrow, garlicky snails, or steak tartare to start, followed by hangar steak with onion rings, fried chicken with mashed potatoes and collards, sautéed skate with potatoes and bacon, a duck club sandwich, or rack of lamb—not to mention fresh oysters, clams, crab legs, crawfish, and other raw-bar delicacies. (Skip the gloppy cheese fondue.) For dessert, you can have a piece of ridiculously good chocolate cake or a banana split.

The answer to the Bromberg brothers' success? They cook food that you like, not just food that they want you to like. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner only. Entrées $10-$30.)

—*Emily Nunn*



BLACK AND WHITE NIGHT *As the lights go up on "Black on White," Heiner Goebbels's music-theatre piece premièring at the Lincoln Center Festival this week, a man sits scribbling at a desk. The stage begins to fill with musicians, who play checkers on a harpsichord lid or throw tennis balls at a bass drum, when they're not reading lines from Poe and Eliot or laying down bursts of atonal jazz. Goebbels, a forty-nine-year-old composer, has broken away from the grim Expressionism of his German heritage using a polyglot musical style—rock beats, Baroque arpeggios, and grungy minimalist funeral chants—to create a playful, striking work about perennially confounding subjects such as death and art.*

LAURENT CILLUFFO

conceived in the museum's dark belly, has just moved into its new and permanent headquarters, a sunny, two-thousand-square-foot play space next door to the familiar big ceremonial canoe at the Seventy-seventh Street entrance. Inside the room, a replica of an African baobab tree spreads its branches over displays about the scientists and artists who studied and re-created it, and a working dinosaur dig busies young paleontologists. There's a surprisingly wide variety of specimens for little paws to hold and shake and investigate, including an outsized dinosaur-toe bone, a mastodon tusk, and, resting in a shredded paper nest, in drawer 52 of a brand-new child-sized specimen cabinet, one emu egg, now broken. The management describes the accident as a learning experience. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Leon Golub, the dour dean of political painters, is the subject of a new retrospective, covering almost fifty years of art work. Through Aug. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM

40 W. 53rd St. (956-3535)—**"Origamic Architecture."** Each diminutive Chrysler Building, Notre Dame, and Guggenheim in this mind-boggling show of pop-up architecture started life as a single sheet of paper. The hybrid art form was inaugurated twenty years ago by the Tokyo professor Masahiro Chatani, who took on the ancient Japanese art of paper-folding with a pair of scissors. Anyone who ever labored over snowflake cutouts in grade school will find it hard to believe the miniature miracles here. Through Sept. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—**"Celebrity Caricature in America."** Years before slugfests broke out between public personalities and the media who tail them, celebrity caricature was all the rage, reaching its heyday between the wars. The stylized imagery was satirical but never savage, and the subjects—from mayors to movie stars to magazine editors—loved the limelight. In addition to portraits of Fiorello LaGuardia and Greta Garbo, the show features everyone from Al Capone to Enrico Caruso to *The New Yorker's* own Harold Ross, disguised as Eustace Tilly. Through Aug. 31. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

STEVEN ASSAEL

Assael belongs to a small tribe of intransigents who wear their academic laurels on their charcoal-smudged smocks. His oil paintings are too inadvertently campy to enjoy for long, but the drawings on display here offer the pleasures of a rare, if slightly tone deaf, virtuosity: imagine a compromise between the life studies of Pierre-Paul Prudhon and the pages of *Air Brush Action* magazine. Through July 27. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

JAMES BARSNESS

With a ballpoint pen and a spigotlike imagination, Barsness continues to create manic surrealist menageries. Reindeer, rats, centipedes, and superheroes, along with sundry Boschian hybrids, cavort across his big dance-floor-like pictures, committing myriad acts of vice and folly. What do they all add up to? Barsness seems to have various semicoherent allegorical schemes in mind, but the end products demonstrate his own cheerfully pathological fecundity. Through Aug. 17. (Adams, 41 W. 57th St. 644-5665.)

TRENT DOYLE HANCOCK

This young artist from Paris, Texas, makes an impressive solo début in paintings and works on paper that scrounge from Johns's letters, Rauschenberg's assemblages, and Guston's fleshy mounds while staking out a messy territory all their own. Hancock's palette tends toward black-and-white and Pepto-Bismol pink, though one canvas is a Skittle-colored riot. Like the narrative guide that accompanies the show, in which characters like Torpedo Boy and The Legend duke it out with vegans, the paintings pulse with fierce imagination. Through July 28. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

"ALTERATIONS"

The twenty artists in this textile show weave together the conceptual and the decorative. Erik Hanson's elegant smoke-blue needlepoint is based on an abstract photograph, its exposure determined by the length of a David Bowie song. Devorah Sperber's Persian rug, an elaborate parlor trick, is made of countless colored pen caps; it appears pixellated until viewed in the accompanying convex mirror. Jim Hodges's nosegay of silk scraps serves as an achingly sweet reminder that summer, like life, is fleeting. Through Aug. 31. (James Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 535-5767.)

"WORKS ON PAPER"

Is coyness a virtue? It feels like one at this seductively low-key show. The eight artists mostly favor eclectic kinds of abstraction, playing pattern (biomorphic, geometric, even plaid) against suggestions of image (a pitcher, a saw, the Eiffel Tower). The effect, especially in works by Thomas Burckhardt, Amy Sillman, and Trevor Winkfield, is like talking to a brilliant friend whose caginess occasionally gives way to candor. Incidentally, this is the first time that Winkfield has exhibited the striking collage mockups that precede (and rival) his paintings. Through July 27. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

Short List

ALEXANDER LIBERMAN

Ameringer Howard, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110. Through Aug. 10.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

NEIL FARBER

Something weird is going on in Winnipeg, where Farber, Marcel Dzama, John Plypchuk, and a few like-minded friends and relatives founded a studio called the Royal Art Lodge. The Lodgers' work shares a cartoony, narrative bent; at times, it's almost indistinguishable—Farber's balloon-head infants and animals look strikingly like those of his nephew, Dzama (who is a year older). For an art world fascinated by cohorts, this back story threatens to overwhelm the pictures themselves, which are displayed here in an emphatically unpretentious crowd. The best of them are deft, glum line drawings, accompanied by captions like "Welcome to Hell, Population 1." Through July 27. (Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.)

SUSAN HILLER
"Psi Girls" is a five-part film projection using clips from Hollywood films about teen-age girls with psychic powers ("Carrie" is notably absent). Hiller's work has long explored the uncanny in relation to the subconscious mind—the Freud museum once commissioned a print—and this installation, with its parti-colored format and percussive soundtrack, has an undeniable hypnotic strength. Unfortunately, to a New York audience up to its eyeballs in girl power (cf. Justine Kurland and Katy Grannan), the installation feels like a paranormal pep rally. Through July 27. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.)

MIES VAN DER ROHE / LOUIS KAHN
To accompany the Mies and Gehry triple bill playing at uptown museums, Protetch has put together a spectacular collection of architectural drawings by two of the greatest practitioners of the last century. As you might expect, Mies's drawings are forcefully spare: a few orthogonals ornamented by quick scribbles to indicate mass. Kahn's aren't exactly fussy either, but it's clear that he took more pleasure in drawing for its own sake. Even in charcoal on tracing paper, his plans and elevations look eerily observed—though many of the projects documented here were never built. Through July 31. (511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999.)

Short List

PETER PINCHBECK
Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770.
Through Aug. 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

TEUN HOCKS
Painted photography is a notoriously drecky genre, but this Dutch artist handles it with a rare, sweet-tempered aplomb. All of his pictures feature a neatly dressed figure—Hocks himself—in a mildly surreal predicament. He's a logger, cutting down a forest with an oar; a birder, leaning forlornly against a tree; a sleeper whose bed straddles a path that winds through fairy-tale hills. It's easy to see echoes of Magritte and Rockwell here, but the connection isn't dishonorable: Hocks shares their weird knack for tweaking banality till it glimmers. Through Aug. 10. (P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

Short List

AIDAS BAREIKIS
Koenig, 359 Broadway. 334-9255.
Through July 28.

PHOTOGRAPHY

KONRAD CRAMER
Cramer (1888-1963), a German expatriate who became one of the first American abstract painters, also hung around Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291 and experimented with photography. He used crumpled cellophane between Polaroid lenses to create some cute Cubist refractions, and he tinkered with photogram and solarization techniques to make easy-on-the-eye nudes and still-lifes. Most of the handsome vintage silver prints here are boldly signed "Cramer/Woodstock," as if to credit the upstate artists' colony as an equal collaborator in his playful machine-age modernism. Through Aug. 24. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.)

"GONE MISSING: BRITISH CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY"
These young British photographers shoot large color interiors and landscapes empty of human subjects. John Offenbach collaborates with architects to create out-of-focus pastel abstractions of utopian spaces; Jason Oddy studies the living spaces of the recently deceased. David Spero's uncontrived views of home and work spaces are the most inviting—one image of an airplane cockpit plays the patterned chaos of navigational dials and buttons against the white light blasting in through the small windows. Through July 27. (Taylor, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-0992.)

"NO BIG PICTURES"
In response to the recent bigger-is-better trend toward mural-size prints, the gallery fills its two small spaces with a roundup of small images, many from its archives. Unique maquettes from Vito Acconci, Chuck Close, and Joel-Peter Witkin are mixed in with vintage prints by Jacques Henri Lartigue, André Kertész, and Paul Outerbridge. Four color Polaroids by Philip-Lorca diCorcia are framed together to force an oblique narrative, and Robert Frank offers a single contact sheet packed with his greatest hits of 1955-56, some of which eventually made it into his seminal book "The Americans." Through Aug. 31. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

"SIZE MATTERS"
This show demonstrates photography's elastic relationship with scale in a selection of prints both tiny and vast. A six-by-eight-foot print of Walker Evans's signature "Penny Picture Display, Savannah, GA" (taken in 1936 and enlarged for his first retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, in 1971) hovers over new, snapshot-size works from Saul Fletcher and mid-nineteenth-century still-lifes by William Henry Fox Talbot. Three wallet-size images from Masao Yamamoto's "Box of Ku" are framed individually, like delicate butterflies, while Chuck Close's six-foot-tall "Self-Portrait" (1999) is so large that the artist's highly detailed pores read like passages of abstraction. Through Aug. 10. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070.)

"TURISMO"
For the most recent Havana Biennial, last November, the Argentine artists Leandro Erlich and Judi Werthein brought snow to Cuba—or rather, a more portable equivalent, powdered Styrofoam. They also brought skis, a sled, and an Alpine backdrop. Then they invited ordinary Cubans to ham it up for the camera with props including faux snowballs. The resulting Polaroids have an appealing, county-fair silliness. But condescension hovers, like a cold front, in the background. Through Aug. 2. (Kent, 67 Prince St. 966-4500.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (860-1777)—Sebastião Salgado's **"Migrations: Humanity in Transition."** Over the past seven years, Salgado has visited more than thirty-five countries, travelling with and photographing some of the nearly one hundred million migrants now wandering the planet. Viewers who follow international news may be familiar not only with the trouble spots he's been to—Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia among them—but also with these images, some of which have appeared in major American news magazines. Nevertheless, the effect of seeing them, particularly the sweeping landscapes, as immaculate black-and-white prints filling these large, open galleries, remains powerful. Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

JAMES BIDGOOD
Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752.
Through Aug. 17.

MARIANA COOK
Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Aug. 10.

"A DOG AND PONY SHOW"
Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.
Through Aug. 3.

BOOK CURRENTS

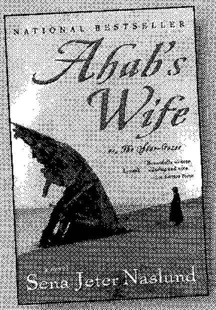
Forecast Party

In December of 1802, a shy thirty-year-old British amateur meteorologist named Luke Howard delivered a modestly titled lecture—"On the Modifications of Clouds"—that would forever alter how we look at the sky. In the course of his presentation, Howard revealed to his rapt, unsuspecting audience that, taking cues from Lamarck and Linnaeus, he had named the clouds, applying a workable taxonomy to the fluffy, ineffable forms that had long preoccupied natural philosophers, farmers, and daydreamers. The language of cumulus, cirrus, stratus, and nimbus was first spoken that winter night nearly two hundred years ago, as Richard Hamblyn reveals in his forthcoming **THE INVENTION OF CLOUDS** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Hamblyn also includes lore from the annals of nephology—the study of clouds—going back to ancient Greece, where weather bulletins ("the shoulders of Virgo are rising") made for popular, if not quite Doppler 4000-worthy, reading.

TONY MILLIONAIRE

The pursuit of accuracy in forecasting is the subject of **AIR APPARENT** (Chicago), Mark Monmonier's breezy, elucidating history of weather mapping, now out in paperback. Descended from Halley's 1686 map of oceanic trade winds and nudged along by the advent of the telegraph system, in 1844, the daily weather map—with its characteristic isotherms, isobars, and pressure fronts—rose to prominence during the twentieth century, reaching new heights of precision with the launch of the first weather satellite, the hatbox-shaped TIROS I, in 1960. According to Monmonier, a professor of geography at Syracuse, "The weather map is like a chessboard," one that allows meteorologists and the general public to "speculate intelligently about the atmosphere's next few moves."

—*Mark Rozzo*



MISSUS

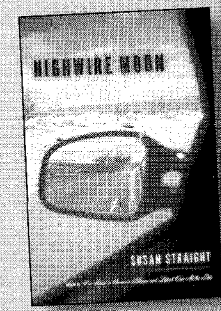
The tale of the woman left in the Pequod's storied wake chronicles her escape from a tyrannical Kentucky father to a rugged New England island where she enjoys adventure aboard a whaler and catches a glimpse of the enigmatic Ahab.

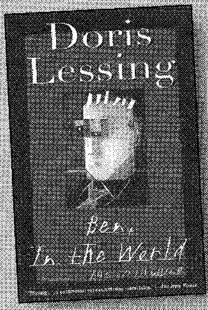
AHAB'S WIFE OR, THE STAR-GAZER
by Sena Jeter Naslund
Pub. Price: $15.00
Our Price: $12.00
Readers' Advantage Price: $10.80

MEXICO

A young Mexican Indian woman's new life in California is destroyed when she is deported. Left behind, her daughter is thrown into the maelstrom of foster care and later goes on a quest to find her mother in the world of migrant labor.

HIGHWIRE MOON
by Susan Straight
Pub. Price: $24.00
Our Price: $19.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.28





MISANTHROPE

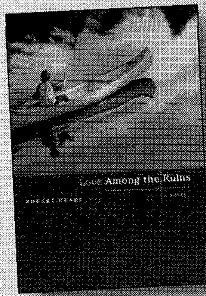
In the sequel to *The Fifth Child*, Doris Lessing relates the experiences of 18-year-old Ben. Estranged from his family, the gangly and monstrous young man seeks his own path in life only to confront a world filled with fear, hostility and deceit.

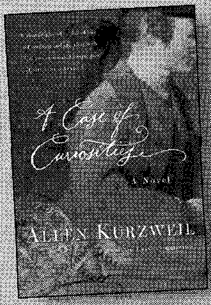
BEN, IN THE WORLD
by Doris Lessing
Pub. Price: $13.00
Our Price: $10.40
Readers' Advantage Price: $9.36

MATES

Two teenagers fall in love amidst the unsettling confusion of 1968. Impelled by physical passion and utopian idealism, they flee the chaos of society to create a new life in the wilderness where their love and ideas are thoroughly tested.

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS
by Robert Clark
Pub. Price: $24.95
Our Price: $19.96
Readers' Advantage Price: $17.96





MACHINE

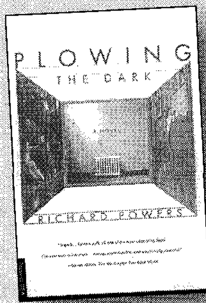
On the eve of the French Revolution, an inventor sets out to dazzle the world with his most daring notion yet—a talking mechanical head. But instead of fame he falls victim to an execution infinitely more bizarre than that of Marie Antoinette.

A CASE OF CURIOSITIES
by Allen Kurzweil
Pub. Price: $14.00
Our Price: $11.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $10.08

MIRAGE

Two empty white rooms—one loaded with a virtual reality arsenal on the shores of Puget Sound, the other holding a young man hostage in a war-torn Mediterranean city—come together in a chamber of shared imagination.

PLOWING THE DARK
by Richard Powers
Pub. Price: $14.00
Our Price: $11.20
Readers' Advantage Price: $10.08



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"MAGNUM: A COMMUNITY OF THOUGHT"
Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.
Through Aug. 4.

"SURF'S UP!"
Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434.
Through Aug. 10.

"WOMAN/GODDESS"
India Center, 530 W. 25th St. 462-4221.
Through Aug. 11.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

OPERA FESTIVAL OF NEW JERSEY
The festival completes its season. July 26 at 7:30: **"Turandot,"** with Anna Shafajinskaia (in the title role), Allan Glassman, Theresa Cincione, and Scott Altman; conducted by Michael Ching. ♦ July 27 at 8: A double bill of Dallapiccola's **"Il Prigioniero"** and Bartók's **"Bluebeard's Castle,"** with Victor Benedetti, Randolph Locke, Dean Peterson, and Eleni Matos; Patrick Hansen. ♦ July 28 at 8: Gina Lapinski directs **"The Magic Flute,"** sung in English, with Lorraine Ernest, Jacqueline Venable, Joseph Kaiser, and Justin Vickers; Richard Tang Yuk. ♦ July 29 at 2: Margaret Lattimore and Christine Brandes take the title roles in Gluck's **"Orfeo ed Euridice"**; David Agler. (McCarter Theatre, Princeton, N.J. 609-258-2787.)

CONCERTS AROUND TOWN

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY
In the first of two summer concerts with the New York Chamber Symphony, Robert Mann conducts music by Mozart and Haydn (the Cello Concerto in C Major, with Hai-Ye Ni, the winner of the 2000 Naumberg Cello Competition) and a string-orchestra arrangement of Dvořák's String Quartet in F Major, Op. 96 (the "American"). (Naumburg Band Shell, Central Park, mid-Park south of 72nd St. July 24 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD FESTIVAL
July 25 at 8: Six pianists, six composers. Vladimir Shakin, Victor Rosenbaum, Pedro Carbone, Mordecai Shehori, Steven Mayer, and Vladislav Kovalsky play music by Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Falla, Liszt, Bernstein, and Mussorgsky, respectively. ♦ July 27 at 8: Michael Oelbaum plays and discusses Beethoven's "Diabelli Variations." ♦ July 28 at 8: No living pianist is more intimately connected with the music of Béla Bartók than György Sándor, who among his many honors holds the distinction of being a former student of the composer. One of the highlights of Sándor's six-decade career was his world première of the piano version of the "Dance Suite," at Carnegie Hall in 1945, with Bartók in attendance; he plays that work once more at the festival's closing concert, as well as music by Zoltán Kodály (another one of his teachers), Beethoven, and Schumann (the Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17). (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. 580-0210, ext. 336.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL
July 25 at 8: A selection of choral and chamber works by Philip Glass, including "Father Death Blues"; "Knee Play No. 3," from "Einstein on the Beach"; and two premières. Performed by the organist Harry Huff, the didgeridoo players Mark Atkins and Ron Murray, and the Dessoff Choirs. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ July 25 and July 27-28 at 8:30: The festival presents its last musical production, Heiner Goebbels's "Black on White: Music Theatre for Seventeen Players," performed by Ensemble Modern. (LaGuardia High School Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St.) ♦ July 26-27 at 8: The simple yet distinctive elements of Glass's style have an all-purpose adaptability that has appealed to a number of directors; "Shorts," the last of the festival's Glass concerts, presents a selection of short films by such filmmakers as Atom Egoyan, Peter Greenaway, and Godfrey Reggio. Performed by the composer and the Philip Glass Ensemble. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500.)

BARGEMUSIC
July 26 and July 28 at 7:30: A concert of Beethoven's three String Trios, Op. 9—fiery and compact works that helped lay the groundwork for his quartets—performed by the violinist Mark Peskanov, the violist Toby Hoffman, and the cellist Nathaniel Rosen. ♦ July 27 at 7:30 and July 29 at 4: Modern music takes over the barge's little stage, with Peskanov, Rosen, Toby Hoffman, the pianist Joel Hoffman, and the clarinettist David Krakauer (taking a night off from his klezmer gigs) presenting music by Hindemith, Lutoslawski, Messiaen, and a première by Joel Hoffman himself. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
The pianist Dena Levine, the cellist Robert LaRue, and others play music by Bach, Arensky, and Beethoven. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 914-664-6934. July 29 at 12:30.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard conducts music by Bach and Mozart (including the Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-Flat Major, with Sung-Mi Im) at the 45 Bleecker Theatre. (45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. For more information, call 799-1259. July 30 at 8.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
The festival continues to be a mainstay of the summer scene, spicing up some mostly familiar programming with an always expanding pool of new artists. July 30 at 8: For the second year in a row, the festival opens with a free outdoor concert, with Gerard Schwarz conducting Mozart's Symphony No. 20, Haydn's Trumpet Concerto (with the young Russian virtuoso Sergei Nakariakov making his long-overdue New York début), and Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony"; expect a crowd. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 31 and Aug. 1 at 8: Schwarz returns to conduct the gala opening-night program, including repeat performances of the Beethoven and Mozart symphonies along with Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola, in which Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman will cover some very familiar ground. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500.)

"CROSSCURRENTS" CONCERT SERIES
Margaret Leng Tan, the virtuoso who has made the toy piano into a respectable instrument, plays pieces by Philip Glass, the Beatles, and others. (Ross Terrace and Garden, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, 2 E. 91st St. July 31 at 6:30. No tickets are necessary, but audience members are requested to bring a blanket for lawn seating.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD
July 25 at 8: Seiji Ozawa and Robert Spano conduct students of the Tanglewood Music Center in Ravel's operas "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges" and "L'Heure Espagnole," the latter fully staged. ♦ July 26 at 8:30: Shostakovich's string quartets have become a passion for the Emerson Quartet, who know the composer's fifteenth (and last) quartet so well that they can perform it from memory. At this concert they present the grand and trenchant Quartet No. 12 in D-Flat Major, one of the great sleepers of the cycle. Music by Haydn and Schumann (the Piano Quintet, with Yefim Bronfman) completes the program. ♦ July 27 at 8:30: Hugh Wolff conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 (the "Pastoral") and Bernstein's glowing, neo-Classical "Serenade" (with the violinist Joshua Bell). ♦ July 28 at 8:30: Stravinsky's tangy ballet score "Pulcinella" is the highlight of Spano's program with the B.S.O., which also includes music by two ardent romantics, Tchaikovsky (the Serenade for Strings) and John Harbison. ♦ July 29 at 2:30: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with Bronfman) and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5; Ozawa conducts. ♦ July 31 at 8:30: The annual "Tanglewood on Parade" concert, with the B.S.O., the Boston Pops, and the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, conducted by Ozawa, Keith Lockhart, John Williams (who previews his music for the upcoming Harry Potter movie), and André Previn; the concert ends with—what else?—the "1812 Overture." (Lenox, Mass. 617-266-1200.)

CARAMOOR
The festival broadens its offerings beyond the classical sphere. July 25-26 at 8:30: "Cabaret in the Courtyard," with Andrea Marcovicci presenting songs in tribute to Mabel Mercer. ♦ July 27 at 8: The pianist Andrew Rangell plays works by Bach, Takemitsu, Janáček (the piano sonata "October 1, 1905"), Chopin, and Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960). ♦ July 28: The first day of the Caramoor Jazz Festival begins at 1:00, with the Herbie Nichols Project, and continues through the evening, with a dinner break at 6:45; the five other ensembles include the Cyrus Chestnut Trio and the Jon Faddis All-Star Quintet (with Jimmy Heath), which presents a program celebrating Louis Armstrong's hundredth birthday. (Venetian Theatre; one ticket grants admission to all events.) ♦ July 29 at 4:30: Peter Oundjian conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's in music by Stravinsky, Beethoven (the Symphony No. 7), and Brahms (the Violin Concerto, with Sarah Chang). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
July 27 at 8: The Ying Quartet plays music by Beethoven, Takemitsu ("Entre-Temps," with the oboist Richard Killmer), and Franck (the magisterial Piano Quintet in F Minor, with John O'Conor). ♦ July 28 at 8: Members of the Tokyo Quartet, Norfolk's reigning ensemble, team up with the Ying for Brahms's String Quintet No. 2 and Mendelssohn's Octet. (Ellen Battell Stoeckel Estate, Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
July 26 at 8: Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro," directed by Stephen Lawless. With Dean Ely, Joyce Guyer, Nicole Heaston, Valerie Komar, and Christopher Schaldenbrand; the conductor is George Manahan. ♦ July 27 at 8: Chabrier's comic opera "L'Étoile," with Torrance Blaisdell, Karina Gauvin, and Christine Abraham; Stewart Robertson. ♦ July 28 at 8: The première of Christopher Alden's staging of Britten's "The Rape of Lucretia," a sordid tale of love, honor, and politics in ancient Rome, with Michelle DeYoung (in the title role), Nathan Gunn, Christine Goerke, and William Burden; Robertson. ♦ July 29 at 2: Handel's "Agrippina," directed by Lillian Groag, with Alexandra Coku, Beth Clayton, Karen Wierzba, Derrick Parker, and David Walker; Harry Bicket conducts. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MARLBORO MUSIC FESTIVAL
The legendary festival, devoted to the classic chamber works of the German repertory, offers concerts each weekend through Aug. 12; programs are announced one week in advance on the festival's Web site (www.marlboromusic.org). (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. July 28-29.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The Whitman String Quartet returns for a concert of Mozart, Beethoven (the second "Razumovsky" quartet), and Franck (the Piano Quintet, with Pedja Muzejevic). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. July 29 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
July 26 at 5: By the conceptual artist Vito Acconci, from monologues in his early audio works. (Dia Center for the Arts Bookshop, 548 W. 22nd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 29 at 7: By the short-story writer Carolyn Cooke and by the novelist Sheila Kohler. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 31 at 6:30: By the *New Yorker* writer Philip Gourevitch, from his latest book, "A Cold Case." (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. 334-3324.)

TOURS
July 26 at 6:30: Big Onion Walking Tours offers a twilight stroll through Central Park. For more information, call 439-1090. ♦ July 29 at 11 A.M.: The architectural historian Francis Morrone discusses the history of the World Trade Center and Battery Park City (part of which was built on landfill that was dredged from the construction of the Twin Towers) on a tour through lower Manhattan. For more information, call 935-3960.

MOVIES OPENING

BREAD AND TULIPS
Silvio Soldini directed this drama about a housewife (Licia Maglietta) who gets fed up with her family and escapes to Venice. In Italian. Opening July 27. (Paris.)

GREENFINGERS
British prisoners compete in the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in a drama written and directed by Joel Hershman. With Clive Owen, Helen Mirren, and David Kelly. Opening July 27.

JACKPOT
Michael and Mark Polish ("Twin Falls Idaho") directed this road movie about an aspiring country-and-Western singer (Jon Gries). Opening July 27. (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

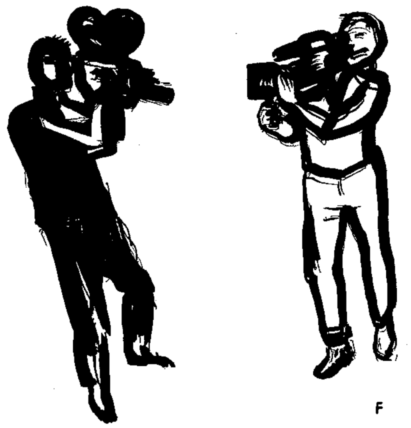
THE MONKEY'S MASK
An adaptation of the verse novel by Dorothy Porter about a lesbian romance and the disappearance of a young poet. With Susie Porter and Kelly McGillis. Samantha Lang directed. Opening July 27. (Quad Cinema.)

101 REYKJAVIK
Baltasar Kormakur wrote and directed this comedy about an indolent twentysomething and his love for a flamenco dancer who also happens to be his mother's girlfriend. In English and Icelandic. Opening July 25. (Film Forum.)

PLANET OF THE APES
A retelling of the classic science-fiction tale, directed by Tim Burton. With Mark Wahlberg and Estella Warren as humans, and Helena Bonham Carter, Michael Clarke Duncan, and Tim Roth as apes. Opening July 27.

THE RIVER
The writer-director Tsai Ming-liang completes the trilogy he began in "Rebels of the Neon God" with this story of an alienated family living in contemporary Taipei. In Mandarin. Opening July 27. (Cinema Village.)

WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER
A comedy about the last day at a summer camp in Maine in August, 1981, written and produced by Michael Showalter and David Wain of "The State." The cast includes Janeane Garofalo, David Hyde Pierce, and Paul Rudd. Opening July 27.



FILM NOTES

A.I.
An extraordinarily accomplished failure. After dithering with this project for years, Stanley Kubrick bequeathed it to Steven Spielberg, who wrote his own screenplay after Kubrick's death. In the bleak world that remains after the polar ice cap has melted, David (Haley Joel Osment), a perfect-child robot programmed to love, so disturbs his neurotic mother (Frances O'Connor) that she turns him loose in the woods. There he hooks up with a friendly stud-gigolo robot (Jude Law, who is certainly more beautiful than anything human). At that point, the movie should have taken off as the story of a science-fiction Pinocchio—a toy who wants to be human—but despite many uncanny moments and some extraordinary visual invention, "A.I.," which appears to celebrate the end of human existence, leaves one in a depressed stupor.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/2/01.) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Coronet Cinema, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

THE BANK DICK
W. C. Fields's funniest vehicle—a virtually nonstop succession of his unique sidelong broadsides at small-town mores and family life. He plays Egbert Souse, the head of a household filled with dissatisfied females who accepts all opportunities for wealth and advancement, including being a film director (for an hour) and a bank security guard. What makes this 1941 film a classic is Fields's patter, with its mysterious mixture of lewdness, derision, and hyperbole; he gazes at a rear-view nude on a bank calendar and proclaims, "It doesn't look unlike the Mona Lisa."—*Michael Sragow* (American Museum of the Moving Image; July 29.)

BOB LE FLAMBEUR
This 1955 oddball caper movie, set largely in Montmartre, begins like a conventional essay on cops, crooks, and the molls who cause dishonor among thieves. A down-on-his-luck gambler (the suave, world-weary Roger Duchesne), preparing to rob the Deauville casino, is placed at risk by the flapping mouths of his partners and their women. The director, Jean-Pierre Melville (who changed his last name from Grumbach after reading "Moby-Dick"), puts a saturnine twist on the action. And the cinematographer, Henri Decaë, working in black-and-white, goes from the subtle gray hues of dawn and twilight to gutter chiaroscuro, giving each camera movement a lovely shape. The movie is slight, even silly, but charming in its preening masculine way. In French.—*M.S.* (Film Forum; July 27-31.)

Jon Gries and Garrett Morris in "Jackpot," opening July 27.

MARK ZINGARELLI

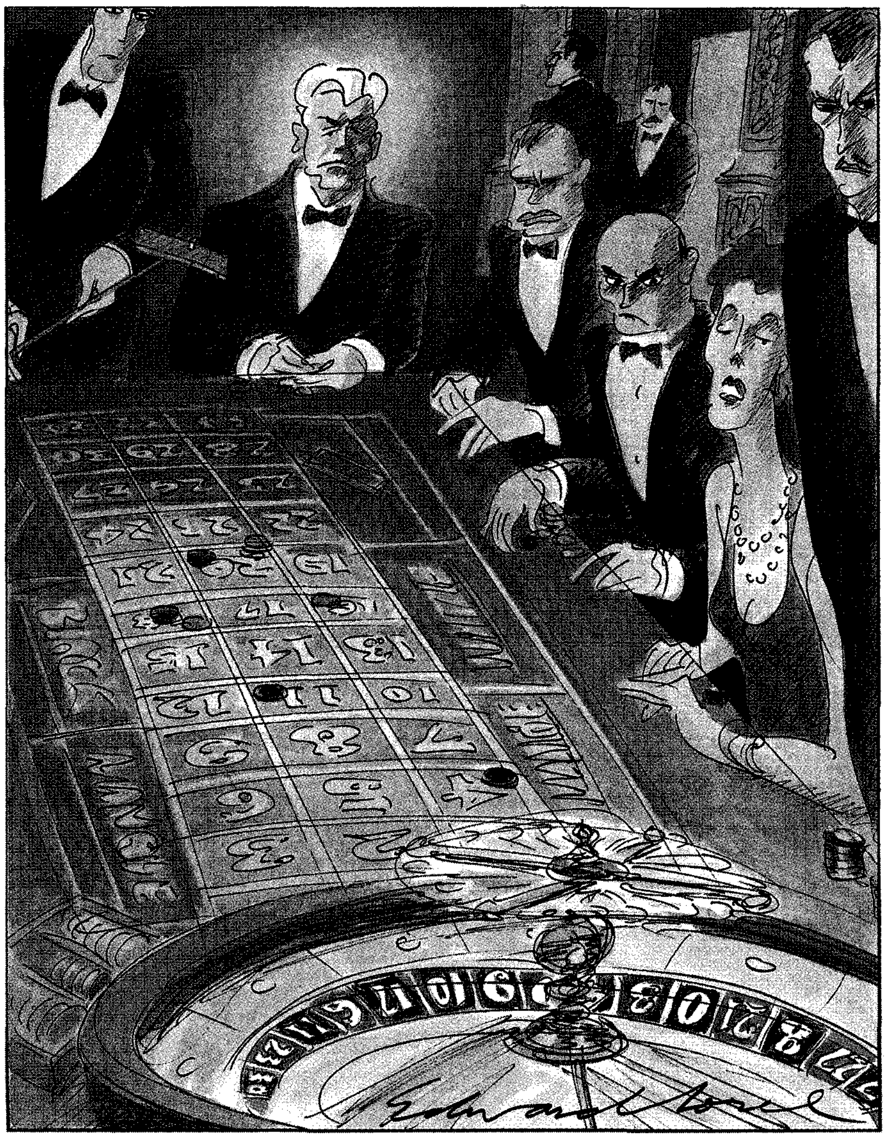
BULLY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center.)

CATS & DOGS
Small children should enjoy Lawrence Guterman's homely fantasy, with its mixture of low, sniffing humor and high-tech effects. Jeff Goldblum and Elizabeth Perkins, who surely can't need the money that badly, play a couple who lose their pooch and replace it with a beagle. Like most beagles, this one is a first-time secret agent sent to foil a worldwide conspiracy of cats. The plot is Chihuahua-light, and there are many scenes that should have been scooped and thrown away. The animals perform in contorted live-action, with the voices of Tobey Maguire, Susan Sarandon, and others issuing uncomfortably from canine lips. How can one movie be both cute and unutterably charmless? With Charlton Heston, brilliantly cast as a mastiff's growl, and Alexander Pollock as the nerdy kid from hell.—*Anthony Lane* (7/9/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

DOWNTOWN 81
Jean Michel Basquiat starred in this New York fable in 1981, when he was nineteen. In the past few years, the film's art director (Maripol) and screenwriter (Glenn O'Brien) found some misplaced reels, redubbed some of the dialogue, and are just now releasing the patchwork result. The movie is set in a crumbling Lower East Side and captures Basquiat as a great urban improviser, someone who walks the sidewalks unencumbered, finding inspiration in chance and accident. Deborah Harry of Blondie, Walter Steding, and Fab 5 Freddy all appear, and there are also performances by James White and the Blacks, the Plastics, DNA, and Melle Mel.—*Michael Agger* (The Screening Room.)

FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN
A cast of computer-generated characters battle evil in this visually adept adaptation of the successful video-game series. Hironobu Sakaguchi, who designed the game and directed the film, maintains the stock science-fiction clichés of his original creation—"Alien"-like aliens and a battle-scarred Earth—but he infuses the story with a save-the-planet charm that almost brings warmth to the virtual proceedings.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

HAIL THE CONQUERING HERO
If you've never seen one of Preston Sturges's classic comedies, you may not quite know what hit you. He uses verbal slapstick as well as visual slapstick, and his timing is so quirkily effective that the dialogue keeps popping off, like a string of firecrackers. In this 1944 satire on hero worship, patriotism,



At Film Forum, Jean-Pierre Melville's "Bob Le Flambeur."

and mother love, Eddie Bracken joins the Marines in the Second World War and is discharged for hay fever. Ashamed, he writes his mother that he's been sent overseas and, thinking he can never return home, tells his girl (Ella Raines) that he doesn't love her anymore. But one night he's out drinking with six Marines, and one of them tells him he should go home and see his beautiful mother; the sergeant agrees, and the upshot is that they drag him home, claiming that he's a war hero. The town goes mad.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; July 28.)

JURASSIC PARK III

A further rematch of *Homo sapiens* versus the velociraptor, with honors fairly even by the end. The raptor has longer teeth and, we now learn, more refined social skills, but man has the satellite phone. After an absence of one movie, Dr. Alan Grant (Sam Neill) returns to a dino-packed island with a bullish assistant (Alessandro Nivola) and a couple of lily-livered adventurers (William H. Macy and Téa Leoni). The result, directed not by Steven Spielberg but by Joe Johnston, is the most streamlined installment of the franchise so far. For your money, you get no ethics lectures, not much science, and a handful of half-baked characters; everything is set, in other words, for a spirited game of chase-and-chew. Isn't that why you bought a ticket in the first place? In English and Raptorspeak, though sadly without subtitles.—*A.L.* (7/23/01) (Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

KISS OF THE DRAGON

The tiny, mild-looking Jet Li, playing a Chinese secret agent, shows up in Paris and joins a team of rogue French cops led by Tchécky Karyo, who rushes about like a madman, screaming profanities in English. Gone are the balletic wonders of the Hong Kong cinema. Westernizing the genre, Luc Besson (who wrote and produced; the film was directed by Chris Nahon) shoots up the lobby of the Ritz and destroys an innocent *bateau-mouche* cruising the Seine. Jet Li is fun to watch, but in a series of absurdly bloody battles he winds up killing most of the Paris police.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

LAMERICA

Gianni Amelio's story of dislocation and chaos in post-Communist Albania came out in 1994 and won accolades from critics, who ranked it with the great European art films of the fifties and sixties. Michele Placido and Enrico Lo Verso play Italian entrepreneurs who set up a fake shoe company in Albania to rake in government funds. They pick a dazed old man who's been a political prisoner for half a century to be their figurehead president, but he swiftly flees into the countryside, leading Lo Verso on a bitter voyage of discovery. Amelio recognizes the difficulty of depicting a foreign land without distortion—that's one reason he filmed in wide-screen Technovision, in his words "an epic format that is neither 'realistic' nor innocent"—but despite his wariness, the Albanians too easily become symbols of fortitude and despair. In Italian.—*M.S.* (Guggenheim Museum; July 28.)

LEGALLY BLONDE

The fabulous Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon), a West Coast sorority queen, follows her escaping boyfriend to Harvard Law School, where she shows up wearing leather and carrying a Chihuahua in her arms. The first-time director Robert Luketic displays a talent for candied artifice and gentle parody, but "Legally Blonde" collapses very quickly into low-grade farce. Almost everyone at Harvard is a jerk or a phony, and the plot, including a murder trial, is sitcom-obvious. See it only for the talented Witherspoon, who manages to embody the *Cosmo* girl, Lancômed to the hilt.—*D.D.* (7/16/01) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Union Square, and Waverly.)

LUMUMBA

Raoul Peck tells the story of the African freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba with fire and grace. The opening scene sets the vérité tone with the sound of a saw cutting through bone; two Belgian soldiers are breaking down Lumumba's body and incinerating it in a ten-gallon drum. From there, the film backtracks to the origins of the Congolese independence movement and proceeds to explain how a man's legacy could be so threatening. Peck handles all of this, including the atrocities, with refinement, and lets the drama of Lumumba's story run smoothly, free of heavy historical detail. Eric Ebouaney is extraordinary in the lead role, the production feels emotionally true, and the speeches generate spontaneous applause. In French and Lingala.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas and Film Forum.)

MADE

Jon Favreau and Vince Vaughn reprise their Mutt-and-Jeff act from "Swingers," but this time in a context uncertainly derived from Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets." A nasty Los Angeles crime boss (Peter Falk) sends the two men—amateurs as criminals—to New York to do a job. The heavyset Favreau is morose and fearful and just wants to come home in one piece; Vaughn, boastful, unreliable, and stupid, has the time of his life. Favreau, who wrote and directed, veers back and forth between comedy and a more serious tone, and the movie winds up suspended in the air. The two actors try to pull the entire story out of their friendship with each other, but the psychological underpinnings are missing: we never really understand what holds this odd couple together. With Sean (Puffy) Combs, viciously incisive as a downtown Manhattan gangster, and Famke Janssen in a vaguely written part as a lap dancer.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

THE SCORE

An intelligent and rather overcivilized caper movie, set in Montreal, which features three generations of great male actors: Marlon Brando (sounding like his long-ago nemesis Truman Capote) as an upper-class aesthete and fence with exquisite manners, Robert De Niro as a saturnine jazz-club owner and safecracker who never takes risks, and Edward Norton as a brilliant but willful young con man and criminal. Their goal: to steal a fabulous royal sceptre from France which has been impounded by the Montreal customs house. Much of the movie consists of the men trying to gain the upper hand on one another, and the acting is so relaxed and skillful that one can enjoy the smooth precision as a virtue in itself. Unfortunately, the writers, Kario Salem, Lem Dobbs, and Scott Marshall Smith, and the director, Frank Oz, worked out the plot without working out how the audience should feel about anything that happens. Emotionally the movie is neutered, and Oz seems to have trouble deciding whether he's making a thriller or another version of his double-cross comedy "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels."—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

SEXY BEAST

A tale of expatriate Cockneys, dry-roasted by the Spanish sun and determined to get England off

EDWARD SOREL

their backs. Gal (Ray Winstone), once a crook, and his wife, Deedee (Amanda Redman), once a porno star, have retired to the Costa del Sol; now they are tracked down by an old acquaintance, Don (Ben Kingsley), who invites Gal back home for one last crime. Jonathan Glazer, the young British director making his début feature, turns the first half of the picture into a cool study of hotheads, saturated with creative cursing; the second half, which finds Gal returning to London, stumbles and slides into the grim traditions of gangsterland. But the movie needs to be seen for its clean compositions, its sure touch of fantasy, and, above all, for the forbidding presence of Kingsley—the prince of darkness, lightly disguised as a human being.—*A.L.* (6/18 & 25/01) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE ANNIVERSARY PARTY
Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, State, and Union Square.
BROTHER
Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.
GHOST WORLD
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH
Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.
JUMP TOMORROW
Chelsea West and Village East Cinemas.
MOULIN ROUGE (5/28/01)
Beekman, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.
OUR SONG
Eastside Playhouse and Murray Hill Cinemas.
SHREK (5/21/01)
Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Sutton 1 and 2, and Union Square.
STARTUP.COM (5/14/01)
Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

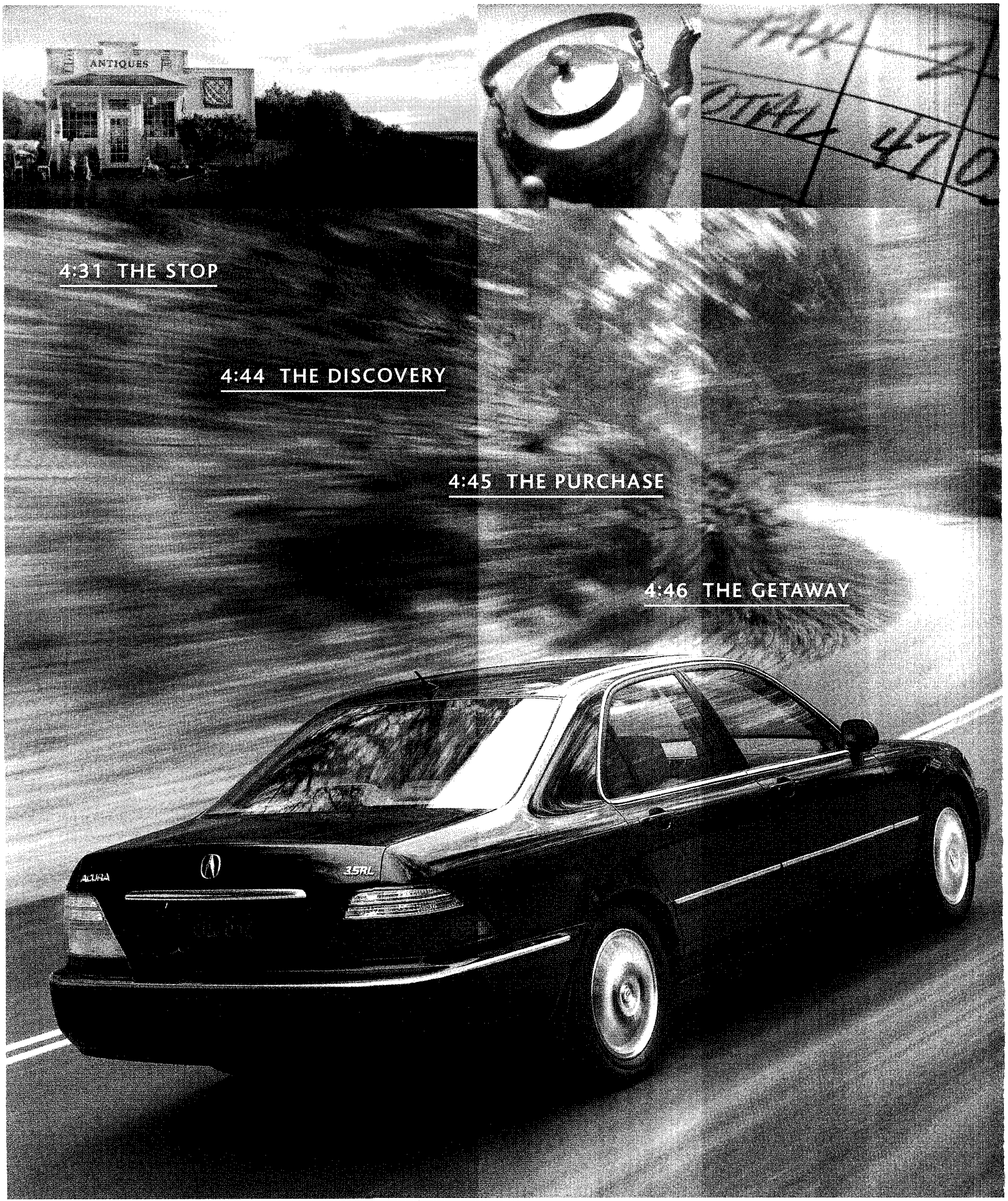
Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Wednesdays, starting at dusk: Free outdoor movies at the Socrates Sculpture Park (Broadway at Vernon Blvd.) in Queens. The feature on July 25 is "Tango" (1988, Carlos Saura; in Spanish). ♦ Through Sept. 9: "Hollywood on the Home Front: American Film in the 1940's." July 28 at 2: "To Be or Not to Be" (1942, Ernst Lubitsch). ♦ July 28 at 4: "Hail the Conquering Hero" (†). ♦ July 29 at 2: "The Bank Dick" (†). ♦ July 29 at 4: "Buck Privates" (1941, Arthur Lubin). ♦ Repertory night. July 28-29 at 6:30: "Cruel Story of Youth" (1960, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Through Aug. 16: "Good Times, Bad Times: The Films of Abel Ferrara." July 27 at 7 and July 31 at 7: "King of New York" (1990). ♦ July 27 at 9:15: "The Funeral" (1996). ♦ July 27 at 11:30: "New Rose Hotel" (1998). ♦ July 28 at 2:30: "China Girl" (1987). ♦ July 28 at 4:30: "Fear City" (1984). ♦ July 28 at 7: "Dangerous Game" (1993). ♦ July 28 at 9:30: "Bad Lieutenant" (1992). ♦ July 28 at 11:45: "The Driller Killer" (1979). ♦ July 29 at 3 and July 30 at 9: "Cat Chaser" (1989). ♦ July 29 at 5 and July 30 at 7: "Ms. 45" (1981). ♦ July 29 at 7: "The Addiction" (1995). ♦ July 29 at 9: "Body Snatchers" (1993).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—July 25 at 7:30: "Redskin" (1929, Victor Schertzinger; silent), with live piano accompaniment by Donald Sosin. ♦ The yakuza movies of Kinji Fukasaku. All films are in Japanese. July 26 at 6:50 and 9:10: "Yakuza Burial—Jasmine Flower" (1976). ♦ July 27 at 6:50 and 9:10: "Battles Without Honor or Humanity" (1973). ♦ July 31 at 6:50 and 9:10: "State Police vs. Organized Crime" (1975). ♦ Selections from the New York Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. July 28 at 2: "Telenovelas & Other Pleasures," a selection of Latino videos (1999-2000). ♦ July 28 at 4:30: "Undetectable" (2001, Jay Corcoran). ♦ July 28 at 7: "Friends and Family" (2000, Kristen Coury). ♦ July 28 at 9:30: "Evocations: Women & Relationships" (1999-2001). ♦ July 29 at 2: "Something Close to Heaven," new works by gay men (1998-2001). ♦ July 29 at 4:30: "The Right Girl" (2001, Theresa L. Brown). ♦ July 29 at 7:10: "Bombay Eunuch" (2001, Alexandra Shiva, Sean MacDonald, and Michelle Gucovsky). ♦ July 29 at 9:30: "Zaïde" (1999, Josée Dayan). ♦ The films of Gregg Araki. July 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Nowhere" (1997).
BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: Free drive-in-style moviegoing. The feature on July 30 is "Stalag 17" (1953, Billy Wilder).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—July 25-26 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "The Blue Angel" (1929, Josef von Sternberg; in German). ♦ Starting July 27 at 1:40, 3:50, 6, 8:10, and 10:10: "Bob Le Flambeur" (†).
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Through Aug. 14: "Women Behind the Camera." All films are in French. July 31 at 12:30 and 6:30: "Empty Days" (1999, Marion Vernoux). ♦ July 31 at 3:30 and 9: "Place Vendôme" (1998, Nicole Garcia).
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—Through July 28: Italian cinematography. July 27 at 7 and July 28 at 3: "The Uncle from Brooklyn" (1995, Daniele Ciprì and Franco Maresco; in Italian). ♦ July 28 at 7: "Lamerica" (†).
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through August 2: A series of half-hour films produced by Regina Ziegler and inspired by the playwright Fernando Arrabal's idea "If it is not erotic, it is not interesting." July 26 at 3:30 and July 29 at 5: "Dream a Little Dream of Me" (1999, Antonis Kokkinos; in Greek), "On Top Down Under" (2000, Fridrik Thór Fridriksson), and "The Night Nurse" (2000, Bernd Heiber; in German). ♦ July 26 at 6 and July 30 at 3:30: "Angela" (2000, Amos Kollek), "The Gas Station" (1999, Jos Stelling), and "Kimono" (2000, Hal Hartley). ♦ July 27 at 3:30 and July 30 at 6: "The Summer of My Deflowering" (2000, Susan Streitfeld), "Powers" (2000, Petr Zelenka; in Czech), and "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" (2000, Eoin Moore; in German). ♦ July 27 at 6 and July 29 at 2: "The Dutch Master" (1994, Susan Seidelman), "The Cloud Door" (1994, Mani Kaul; in Hindi), and "The Insatiable Mrs. Kirsch" (1994, Ken Russell). ♦ July 27 at 8: "Can I Be Your Bratwurst, Please?" (1999, Rosa von Praunheim), "Georgian Grapes" (1999, Georgi Shengelaya; in Georgian), and "The Red Garter" (1999, Markus Fischer; in German). ♦ July 28 at 1:30 and July 31 at 6: "Wet" (1994, Bob Rafelson), "Vroom, Vrooom, Vroooom" (1994, Melvin Van Peebles), and "Touch Me" (1994, Paul Cox). ♦ July 28 at 3:30: "Sweeties" (1995, Cinzia Th. Torrini; in Italian), "Hotel Paradise" (1995, Nicolas Roeg), and "Devilish Education" (1995, Janusz Majewski; in Polish). ♦ July 28 at 5:30 and July 31 at 3:30: "Sambólico" (1996, Mika Kaurismäki; in English and Portuguese), "Elephants Never Forget" (1996, Detlev Buck; in German), and "The Waiting Room" (1996, Stelling).
THE MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Sept. 16: "Hello, Goodbye," screenings of pilots, premières, and final episodes of classic television shows. Thursdays through Sundays at 3. ♦ Restored silent films with full orchestration. July 27 at 6 and July 28-29 at 2: "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (1921, Rex Ingram).
THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Through Aug. 2: The films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa. All films are in Japanese. July 27 at 4:10, 6:10, 8:10, and 10:10: "Séance" (2000). ♦ July 28 at 3:45, 6, 8:15, and 10:30: "License to Live" (1999). ♦ July 29-30 at 1:25, 5, and 8:20: "Serpent's Path" (1998). ♦ July 29-30 at 3:20, 6:40, and 10: "Eyes of the Spider" (1998). ♦ July 31 at 4, 6, 8, and 10: "Charisma" (1999).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through July 31: A tribute to Harold Pinter. July 25 at 1:30, July 26 at 6, and July 28 at 7:10: "The Quiller Memorandum" (1996, Michael Anderson). ♦ July 25 at 3:45 and July 28 at 5: "The Comfort of Strangers" (1991, Paul Schrader). ♦ July 25 at 6 and July 26 at 1:30: "Langrishe, Go Down" (1978, David Jones). ♦ July 25 at 8:30 and July 26 at 3:45: "The Heat of the Day" (1989, Christopher Morahan). ♦ July 26 at 8:15: "The Go-Between" (1971, Joseph Losey). ♦ July 27 at 1 and July 28 at 2:45 and 9:15: "The Caretaker" (1964, Clive Donner). ♦ July 27 at 3:10 and 8: "The Homecoming" (1973, Peter Hall). ♦ July 29 at 2:45 and 7:20 and July 30 at 6:30: "Accident" (1967, Losey). ♦ July 29 at 5 and 9:30, July 30 at 4 and 8:45, and July 31 at 4: "The Servant" (1963, Losey).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4:44 THE DISCOVERY
4:45 THE PURCHASE
4:46 THE GETAWAY
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THE NEW YORKER

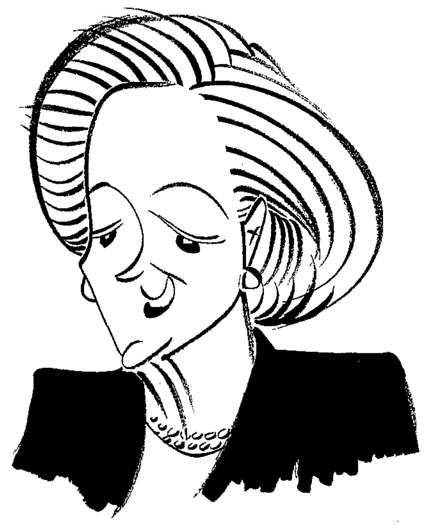
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MRS. GRAHAM

Of all the great newspaper proprietors of the century just past, none are likely to be remembered as vividly, and certainly none as intimately, as Katharine Graham. It's not that her life was more colorful than those of any of the rest of them (William Randolph Hearst took that cake, and ate it, too), or that her empire was more far-flung (those of Gannett, Newhouse, and Murdoch, among others, reached farther if not deeper), or that her newspaper was the best in the country (on most days the Sulzbergers' New York *Times* held, and holds, that position), or even that she made unparalleled improvements in an important paper's quality (Otis Chandler improved his Los Angeles *Times* more, if only because what he started out with was so abysmal). Unlike Joseph Patterson, of the New York *Daily News*, or Henry Luce, of *Time*, Mrs. Graham did not found a revolutionary new publication or pioneer novel forms of presenting printed information. She was not self-made; her public role came to her unbidden, in middle age. But, in ways that none of her peers matched, she managed to become the author, figuratively and then literally, of her own life.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The publisher of the Washington *Post*, it turned out, didn't just know how to publish; she knew how to write. "Personal History," the autobiography she labored over throughout her seventies, was the most surprising and triumphant of her many accomplishments, and it was hers alone. The book succeeds on both the levels that its title suggests. It is a history of an energetic and difficult family, of the development of an extraordinary journalistic and business enterprise, and of a slice of imperial Washington from the late nineteen-twenties through the end of the century. That history is told almost entirely through people and the author's direct experience of them; surrounded by the famous from childhood, she was a close and retentive observer of her world. The book is personal in a deeper way, too, a way that lifts it above anecdote. Its author is a careful, respectful, and honest recorder of the emotions of others and especially of her own. "Personal History" is a kind of three-hundred-thousand-word Rosebud, and it is a work of literary and moral merit. When it came out, in 1997, it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize—and, what's more, it deserved it.



Katharine Graham inherited the *Post* from two men. Her father, Eugene Meyer, who was descended from a distinguished Alsatian Jewish family, became a wealthy financier and then a valued government official under five Presidents. He bought the *Post* for a song at auction in 1933; in 1946, after he was appointed the first head of the World Bank, he turned it over to his thirty-year-old son-in-law, Philip L. Graham, a brilliant, restless lawyer who had clerked for Felix Frankfurter. Phil Graham, worn out by manic depression, committed suicide in 1963, and his widow, at forty-six, began the steady transformation of the *Post* from a mediocre paper into a great one and of "Mrs. Graham" from a wife-of appellation into a queenly title.

A 1963 copy of the *Post* would look familiar to a reader of the current one: the chiselled nameplate, the clean Bodoni headlines, even a few of the bylines—Art Buchwald, Robert Novak, the cartoonist Herblock. But the content was mostly shallow and canned, the resemblance to the *Post* of today strictly skin-deep. Eugene Meyer and Phil Graham had created the material conditions for a great leap forward, bringing the Post from the bankrupt fifth of five Washington dailies to a profitable company with an array of other properties, including *Newsweek*. It was left to Mrs. Graham and her charismatic editor, Benjamin Bradlee, to put bone, muscle, and spirit under the paper's skin.

The climax of Mrs. Graham's journey—and the *Post's*, and American journalism's—came in the early nineteen-seventies. The Pentagon Papers was initially the *Times'* scoop; but the *Post*, playing catch-up, may have run the greater risk. (The Washington Post Company was about to go public, and the Nixon White House's anger might have done real damage.) Watergate, of course, belonged to the *Post* from beginning to end, and the *Post* belonged to Mrs. Graham. The courage she summoned in the face of serious, and at the time frightening, abuses of power put democracy in her debt in a way that few other American publishers, perhaps none, have ever equalled.

Mrs. Graham was criticized, not always unfairly, for her relentless socializing with powerful people the *Post* covered. But under her stewardship the paper moved away from the manipulative cronyism that had marked it under her husband and toward the fulfillment of its slogan, "An Independent Newspaper." Her sex protected her even as it hampered her, tempering her instinctive respect for the proprieties with a skepticism about the received hierarchies. In 1970, when forty-six women at *Newsweek* filed a sex-discrimination suit, she asked her male executives, "Which side am I supposed to be on?" They assumed she was joking, but she wasn't. She was a feminist in spite of herself.

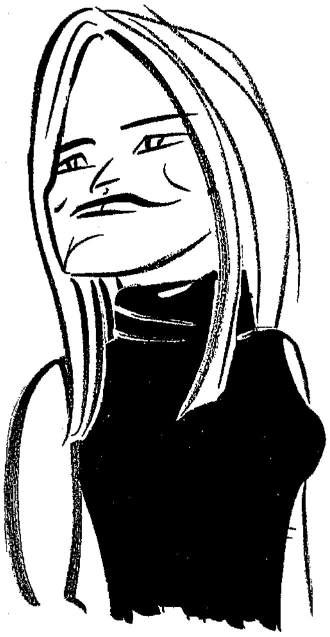
Mrs. Graham remained active right up until last Saturday, when she suffered head injuries in a fall while she was attending a business conference in Sun Valley, Idaho. She died three days later without regaining consciousness. She was eighty-four. Some of the many tributes to her have had a faintly condescending edge, as if she had somehow overcome the disadvantages of wealth, education, and family to make something of herself. This is partly the result of her own frankness, to her friends and in her book, about the feelings of inadequacy with which she (like almost everyone, truth be told) struggled. But, as the story she tells in "Personal History" also makes clear, the strengths the world saw in her during the second half of her life—intelligence, independence, determination, moral courage—had been there all along.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

DEPT. OF MOTOR VEHICLES

FREE LIZZIE!

In the early morning of July 7th, the thirty-year-old publicist Lizzie Grubman backed her father's brand-new Mercedes-Benz S.U.V. into a crowd outside a Southampton night club, injuring sixteen people. Shortly before the incident, Grubman had had a loud argument with the night club's bouncers, one of whom wanted her to move her car from the fire lane. She allegedly told him, "Fuck you, white trash," and then hit the accelerator hard. To the tabloids, the event has been irresistible—Grubman's father is a famous entertainment lawyer; she is a bottle blonde; she represents Britney Spears—and for the past two weeks the city has been full of gleeful philosophizing about entitlement, arrogance, and the perils of spoiled rich kids getting angry behind the wheel of Daddy's S.U.V. But what, exactly, happened in the Mercedes that night? As it turns out, Grubman's argument that it was an accident has foundation. She appears to have been the victim of a well-understood problem known as "unintended acceleration," or "pedal error."



Lizzie Grubman

This does not mean, as some have surmised, that Grubman put the car in reverse, thinking that it was in drive. If that was the case, why didn't she just hit the brake as she sped backward across the parking lot? Pedal error, by contrast, occurs when a driver has her right foot on what she thinks is the brake but is actually the accelerator. When the car begins to move, the driver responds by pressing down on the pedal further still, in an attempt to stop the car. But that, of course, only makes the problem worse.

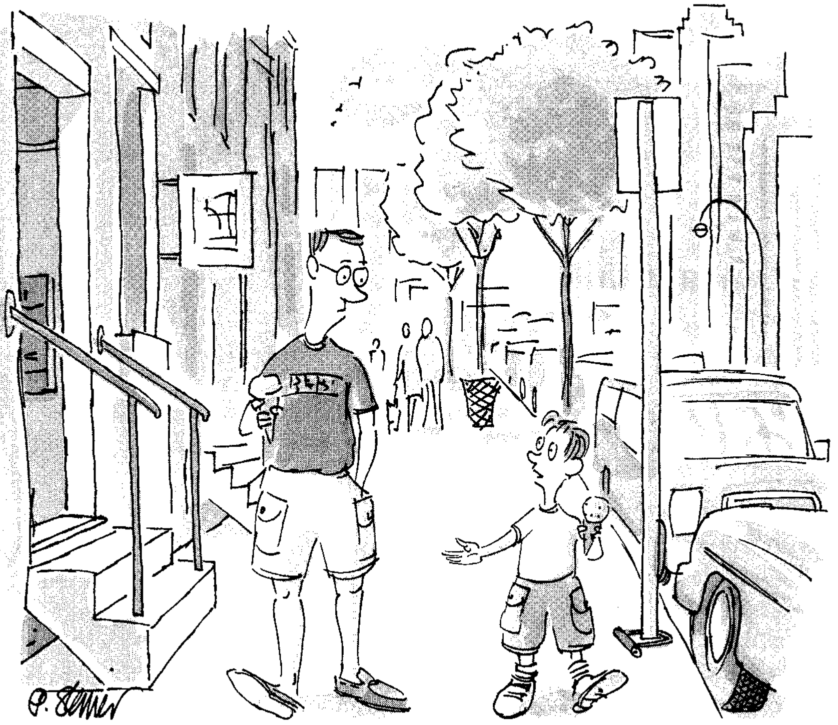
Why do people make pedal errors? In a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon that appeared in the June, 1989, issue of the journal *Human Factors*, the U.C.L.A. psychologist Richard A. Schmidt argues that any number of relatively innocent factors can cause a "low-level variability in the foot trajectory toward the brake"—meaning that a driver aims for the brake and misses. In "Unintended Acceleration: A Review of Human Factors Contributions," Schmidt writes, "If the head is turned to the left, as it might be while looking in the left side mirror, reaching for the seatbelt, or other, similar maneuvers in the initiation of the driving sequence, the result could be systematic biases to the right in the perceived position of the brake pedal. This bias could be as large as 6 cm in a driver of average height if the angular bias were 5 deg." That bias is more than enough to cause pedal error.

It is worth noting that there are five factors that have been associated with an increased probability of unintentional acceleration. It happens more frequently to older people, to women, to short people, to people who are unfamiliar with the cars they are driving, and to people who have just got into a car and started it up. Grubman, who is on the short side and had reportedly driven her father's car only twice before, qualifies on four of those five grounds.

Here, then, is a perfectly plausible explanation for what happened that night. Grubman gets into the car, puts it in reverse, and then twists around to see if anyone is behind her, her foot slipping off the pedal as she does so. As a result, the trajectory of her right foot is thrown off by a few inches, and when she puts her foot back down, what she thinks is the brake is actually the accelerator. The car leaps backward. She panics. She presses harder on the accelerator, trying to stop the car. But her action makes the car speed up. Grubman was parked approximately fifty feet from the night club, and if we assume that she was accelerating at a rate of .4 g's (not unlikely, given her 342-horsepower vehicle), she would have covered that fifty feet in roughly 2.8 seconds. Wade Bartlett, an expert in mechanical forensics who has studied more than three dozen cases of unintended acceleration, says, "When faced with a completely new situation, it would not be unusual for someone to require three seconds to figure out what's going on and what to do about it." In some instances, it's been reported, drivers have mistakenly continued to press the accelerator for up to *twelve* seconds. Grubman's accident is a textbook case of pedal error.

Understanding pedal error may help to explain Grubman's intent that night. Of course, nothing in the scientific literature explains why someone would park in a fire lane, swear at a bouncer, leave the scene of an accident, and dodge a Breathalyzer. For that, we have the lawyers and the New York *Post*.

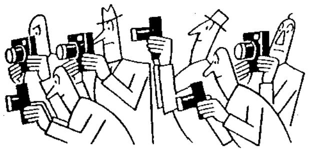
—*Malcolm Gladwell*



"Dad, who runs the country if anything happens to the Vice-President?"

• •

SOUND FAMILIAR? DEPT.
THE JOURNALIST AND THE CONGRESSMAN



There are many ways to enter the Capitol: the Rotunda Door, the Law Library Door, and the Document Door, which was renamed the Memorial Door, in honor of the U.S. Capitol Police officers who were slain there three years ago. There is also the Carriage Entrance Door, which in recent years has come to be known as "the scandal door."

The scandal door offers several advantages to the congressman who finds himself the object of a media stakeout: it is close to a driveway and is accessible only to members of Congress and their staff, and there's no X-ray machine, so you can slip into the building and out of the public eye very quickly.

Congressman Gary Condit chose this door when he returned from the House of Representatives' July 4th recess a few weeks ago. Cameramen had been planted outside since dawn. At four in the afternoon, Condit burst through the door, nodded to the officers, and sailed past the metal detector. He moved briskly, head held high, as though to convey a sense of urgent purpose. His strained smile, aimed at no one in particular, seemed to be on the verge of collapse. A group of congressmen standing by a staircase stopped discussing the campaign-finance-reform bill. Behind Condit, a roiling pack of cameramen, held back by two Capitol policemen, were trying to force their way into the building. An arm slid through the door. The officers wrestled it back.

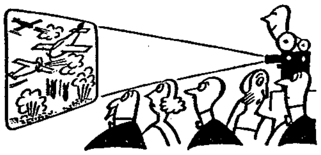
Condit turned a corner, bolted past his colleagues, and disappeared into the Members' Dining Room on his way to the refuge of the House floor. For a long time, no one said anything. Then one of the congressmen, a Republican, said, "You know about the staircase, don't you?" He nodded toward the stairs that Condit had just passed. "That's where the reporter killed the congressman." Seeing Condit had reminded him of a piece of Capitol lore, so he proceeded to tell the story of the Patent Office Scandal of 1887.

In 1887, Representative William Preston Taulbee, a married man, was caught "trysting" with an eighteen-year-old female employee in the patent office. Charles Kincaid, a correspondent for the Louisville *Times*, reported the affair, describing the elaborate precautions and circuitous routes that Taulbee and his mistress took to keep their assignations secret. Taulbee was outraged at the invasion of privacy, but he declined the newspaper's offer to give his own version of events. For the next three years, he bullied the reporter, verbally and physically. On February 28, 1890, Kincaid, who was weak from typhoid, finally became fed up. One afternoon, he confronted Taulbee, just inside the Carriage Entrance Door, pulled out a pistol, and shot him in the head. The congressman collapsed on the stairs and died eleven days later. "I did it," the reporter said, upon surrendering. On April 8, 1891, after a trial in the District of Columbia's criminal court, a jury delivered its verdict: not guilty.

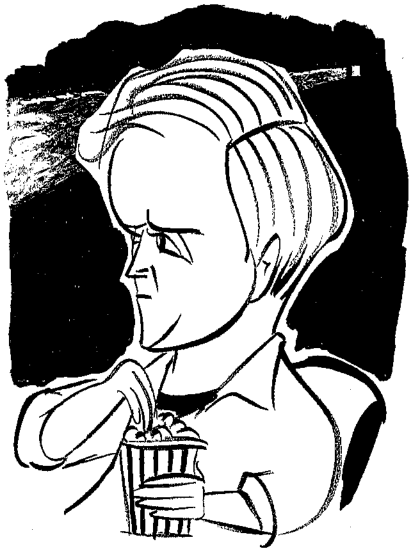
When the congressman had finished telling his story, he slipped off and joined Condit on the House floor.

—*Joshua Green*

SNEAK PREVIEW
APOCALYPSE AGAIN



In recent weeks, there have been numerous preview screenings of Francis Ford Coppola's new, expanded cut of "Apocalypse Now," his 1979 film about the Vietnam War. One of them, in a small room on West Fifty-fourth Street, became a sort of reunion of men who had been involved, in one way or another, in the war. Among them were David Halberstam, who wrote "The Making of a Quagmire" and "The Best and the Brightest"; Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers; and Dan Rather and Peter Jennings, who were young correspondents. Before the film began, they gathered outside the screening room for wine and sandwiches, trading E-mail addresses, lunch promises, and bits of Vietnam-alumni gossip. Some of these men had not seen each other in thirty years.



Bob Kerrey

One of the last guests to arrive was Bob Kerrey, the former senator, who is now the president of the New School. Since the revelation, this spring, that as a lieutenant in Vietnam in 1969 he may have ordered the killing of civilians, Kerrey would seem to be the last person who'd want to appear at a journalist-infested screening of "Apocalypse Now Redux," but there he was, striding up to Coppola to introduce himself. Across the room, a bystander turned to Harvey Weinstein, the co-chairman of Miramax, which is distributing the film, and exclaimed, "Look at that!" Weinstein said, "Wow!" and a Miramax photographer closed in. Ellsberg and Rather joined them, and the four men—Kerrey in chinos, an untucked work shirt, and tennis shoes, Coppola in his usual Hawaiian shirt, the two others in dark suits—stood still for the camera. Then Kerrey exchanged a few civil words with Rather, who had grilled him on the air about his war record in May.

Minutes later, the movie started. Kerrey found an aisle seat toward the back of the room. Occasionally, members of the audience attempted to sneak a peripheral glance at him, to see how the film—the slaughter aboard the sampan, the Wagnerian helicopter raid—might be affecting him, but all they saw was a man sunk deep in his seat, with an umbrella in his lap.

When the movie was over, Kerrey ducked out, leaving the rest of the old Vietnam hands to speculate about what might have passed through his mind as he watched the film. The consensus seemed to be that it had been courageous of him to come. "People were unsure how it would shed light on his situation," Coppola said. "It's a film about morality. Who among us is able to judge a situation so extraordinary? There's a line of Willard's in the film: 'Charging a man with murder in this place was like handing out speeding tickets at the Indy 500.' "

Two days after the screening, Kerrey himself seemed amused by it all. "It was a nice invitation, and it gave me a chance to see the movie, and I was free for an evening," he said.

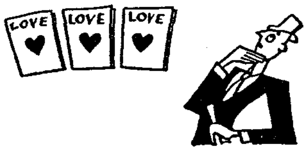
Had any of the scenes in the movie been particularly disturbing to him? "The whole movie is disturbing," Kerrey said. "That's what movies are supposed to do: they're supposed to disturb people. They're supposed to awaken as well as entertain, and this was a movie that did that.

"In general," he continued, "I try to keep my mind from creating fear that prevents me from doing things that I might find enjoyable. That's what this sort of thing is. 'Gee, should I go, should I not go? I liked it the first time, I might like it the second time, so I'm going to go to the movie.' I didn't see it as a great political statement or anything. I just went to the movie."

He added, "I might not have gone if I'd been told I was going to be sitting with Dan Rather."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

WANT AD
EXTRA MADONNA TICKET



Three weeks ago, Adam Levine had an idea. "I was out in L.A., sitting by the pool at the Four Seasons, and all of a sudden it struck me: Why shouldn't I hold a contest?" Back in May, Levine, a thirty-seven-year-old advertising brand director at Deutsch, in Chelsea, had bought two tickets on eBay for Madonna's "Drowned World" concert this week at Madison Square Garden—at fifteen hundred dollars for the pair. But he hadn't managed to round up a date for the show. Then "everything came together," he said the other day. "Madonna is a gay icon. Tickets are going for thousands of dollars, and I've got two of them. Why should I have to decide among my friends and family?"

On Friday, July 13th, a little before noon, Levine launched a Web page with the headline "Be my date for the Madonna concert CONTEST." He then wrote, "The tickets are on the floor, but the seat next to me is empty. Are you the man to fill it? If you're a single, gay male in your late 20's to early 40's and you live in the NYC area, simply, E-mail me: your vitals; a 50-word or less essay on why you should be my date . . . anything else you think could sway the judge (a picture? two?)."

By sundown, he had received fifty responses. By Monday, July 16th, the number had climbed above a hundred. "I'm not going to meet all one hundred—I don't have time between now and the concert," he said that evening in his spare, modern office as he clicked through E-mails and digital photographs from contestants. Levine has dark hair shaved close, a sharp chin, and mischievous eyes, and he wore a slate-gray Katharine Hamnett suit with an open-collared aubergine shirt. On his desk were a tube of Kiehl's moisturizer, a miniature Zen garden, an open pack of Band-Aid-size meditation cards ("Transformation" was face up), and a copy of *People:* "Julia and Ben—What Went Wrong."

"I haven't had a serious relationship for four years," Levine said. "Gay dating in New York is very tough. It's predicated on your body fat—it's much worse than it is for women. Having that six-pack aesthetic, that perfect body, has become a passport to getting onto the A-list. I work out only three or four times a week."

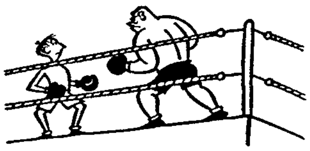
He went on scrolling through his E-mails. "Oh, here's one from a twenty-one-year-old," he said. "Isn't he sweet?" The computer screen showed a shy Robby Benson type in jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. "Would I love to take a twenty-one-year-old to a Madonna concert?" Levine asked. "Yes. Would I love to date a twenty-one-year-old? No." Next! A suntanned Adonis smiled from the screen, waist-deep in a tropical blue sea. Next! A forty-year-old entrant (no photo) wrote, under the subject line, "You'll like me, you'll really, really like me!" Then: "I'm 5'11, 170 lbs (enough muscle to be able to walk the 8th Avenue runway with my head held high)." The man argued that he should be picked because "when I stadium-concert-dance I don't look like somebody's dad."

Once Levine winnows the entries (by Friday, the number had risen to two hundred and twenty), he'll send a photograph of himself to the finalists. "I don't want anybody to be let down when they meet me," he said. He worries that Madonna may resent her unwitting role in his romantic fortunes. Liz Rosenberg, Madonna's publicist, put those fears to rest. "If he finds love, no doubt Madonna would be thrilled to contribute to the happiness of any gay man in the world," Rosenberg said.

If the contest doesn't work out, Levine has a backup companion, who doesn't care about the condition of his abs: his mother, who lives in Queens. "She sent an E-mail to my site," Levine said. "It read, 'This is your mom writing. If no one suits you, I would love to go. Will send photo if need be. Good luck!' "

—*Liesl Schillinger*

RINGSIDE
THE UNNECESSARY DEATH OF BEETHAVEAN SCOTTLAND



At the age of twenty-seven, Max Kellerman has already established a reputation in the boxing world as someone who speaks his mind. An analyst for ESPN and a graduate of Columbia, he has followed the sport since he started watching with his father at the age of three, and he peppers his commentary with references to obscure middleweights, recollections of long-ago knockouts, and sharp judgments about the messy state of boxing in this country. Kellerman was ringside on June 26th, when Beethavean Scottland squared off against George Jones in a light-heavyweight bout on the deck of the U.S.S. Intrepid, which is docked in the Hudson River, off midtown Manhattan.

Scottland, twenty-six, was knocked out in the final round. He was rushed to Bellevue Hospital, where he was operated on twice, but the damage to his brain was too severe, and on July 2nd he died. The New York State Athletic Commission, which regulates boxing in the state, is reviewing a tape of the bout to see if any irregularities occurred. ESPN has refused to release a copy to the public, so most journalists writing about the fight, unable to see it for themselves, have focussed on Scottland's determination. " 'Bee,' as friends knew him, did everything exactly the way it should be done," Thomas Boswell wrote in the Washington *Post.* "Nobody, it seems, did anything wrong during or after the fight."

A viewing of the tape reveals that a great deal did go wrong, however, and that Max Kellerman repeatedly said so. During the first few rounds, Kellerman's comments were muted. Jones had three inches and several pounds on Scottland, and went on the offensive from the start. Through the first three rounds, Jones landed fifty punches to Scottland's eleven and opened a cut above his left eye. In the fourth round, Kellerman noted that Scottland was taking a "brutal beating." Then, midway through the fifth, Jones backed Scottland onto the ropes and delivered a dozen hard blows to his head, which he followed with twenty more vicious punches. "That's it!" Kellerman shouted. "That's it! That's it! That's it!" Scottland, he observed, is "too tough for his own good. . . . This is how guys get seriously hurt. . . . I prefer referees who err on the side of caution."

But the referee, Arthur Mercante, Jr., refused to intervene. As the sixth round began, Kellerman said, "I'm the type of guy who'd rather see fights stopped too early than too late." In the seventh round, the pummelling continued. "I don't like the way he's getting hit," Kellerman said. "Those are the cumulative punches that lead to things that you don't want to hear about after the fight." The round ended with Jones landing another dozen heavy blows. "I don't like it," Kellerman said. "If you're in Scottland's corner, you have to ask yourself, 'Is it worth it, for the damage he's sustaining? Is it worth it for the kid's life to stay in these final rounds?' I would say no."

In the eighth round, Scottland showed some signs of life, but Kellerman was unimpressed. He said, "I'll trade a few epic comebacks for fewer fighters walking around on their heels later in life." As the tenth round began, Jones landed another series of hard blows to Scottland's head. "I don't like what I'm seeing," Kellerman said. Seconds later, Jones caught Scottland with a hard left, causing his legs to buckle. Before Scottland could fall, Jones delivered a crushing right to the side of his head. Finally, with forty-five seconds remaining in the fight, Scottland hit the canvas.

Only then did the ringside physician jump in. But it was too late. After Scottland's body went limp, Kellerman said, "I feel nauseated. I feel sick. Damn it, why does this have to happen?"

Kellerman still doesn't have an answer. He won't second-guess the referee or Scottland's corner, but he has tough words for the state athletic commission, some of whose members he dismisses as "political hacks." Kellerman reserves his harshest judgment for himself. Conducting his own review of the fight the other day, he says he's been unable to watch past the seventh round. "It's a frustrating feeling," he said. "A feeling of guilt. Maybe I could have done something."

—*Michael Massing*

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DEPT. OF POPULAR CULTURE

COMICS FROM UNDERGROUND

What happens when an alternative cartoonist makes it to the movies?

BY TAD FRIEND

"This is a pretty good store," Daniel Clowes said as we walked into the Dr. Comics & Mr. Games shop near Clowes's home, in Oakland, California. He sounded optimistic, but, having spent some time with him, I expected that to change. Clowes is an alternative cartoonist: he draws and writes a deadpan comic book called "Eightball," which is filled with riffs and short stories about outsiders whose high hopes for the bounties of culture, the benevolence of strangers, or for just riding the subway in peace are invariably destroyed.

The front of Dr. Comics was all board games, and Clowes said, "This is where they make their money." The middle of the store was rack upon rack of superhero comics and violent "graphic novels," and Clowes scowled. "I really hate this shit," he said. Then he noticed a 1951 "Space Squadron": on the cover was a squat red rocket and spacemen floating in bulbous suits. "That's so great," he said, and his huge gray eyes seemed to glow. "That unthreatening quaintness, that X factor of weird old men trying to draw for children. It'll be panel after panel of inexplicably strange Freudian dogma." Gesturing at the "Black Widow" and "Hellblazer" graphic novels below, he said, "This crap looks like it was airbrushed on the side of a van in 1973 by some surly young creep."

A gangly man of forty with thin, graying hair, Clowes wore a short-sleeved checked shirt, chinos, and black shoes, and he moved stiffly, his arms close by his sides. On the rare occasions that alternative cartoonists leave the house, they resemble old men after a long hospital stay. When Clowes draws himself, he often makes his head look egg-shaped and sinister, with bulging eyes and fishhooks of sweat at his temples. "Dan reminds me of that distinguished alien who comes down the ramp of the flying saucer," says his friend George Meyer, a writer for "The Simpsons." "He has a regal bearing, and intelligence shines through his eyes, but you don't know what's really going on in there."

Our search finally ended at the rear of the store, where Clowes stretched a lank arm at the single copy of "Eightball," which is the best-selling alternative comic book in the country. When I pointed out a whole "Dan Clowes" section nearby, he was not mollified. "It's tiny, and I'm hidden in the back, behind all the stuff I hate." He sighed. "All these hopeful kids send me their 'zines, and it gets tougher and tougher to write back—'Keep going, put in hundreds of hours of work and you, too, will have a slightly higher circulation on your self-published mini-comic.' "

When Clowes produces an issue of "Eightball" and the thirty-thousand-copy print run sells out two years later, he nets fifteen thousand dollars. (These days, he makes the bulk of his seventy-thousand-dollar income not from the comics but from selling the original artwork.) A typical Clowes fan is truly fanatical: the comedian Margaret Cho wrote to him, "I love your work as much as I hate myself." But having a batch of hip celebrity admirers such as Quentin Tarantino and Todd Solondz does not help to pay his mortgage.

Hands in his pockets, Clowes stared at a "Weirdo" comic by R. Crumb, the man whose "Zap Comix" anthology defined underground comics in the nineteen-sixties. With *Mad* magazine as inspiration, Crumb and others, including Gilbert Shelton and Justin Green, started turning out groovy work aimed not at kids but at adults. Their antiwar, pro-LSD, very pro-toilet-humor "comix" were available in head shops, and soon became the thinking hippie's essential bong accessory. Such now forgotten titles as "Wonder Wart-Hog" and "Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary" regularly sold fifty thousand copies.

But when head shops began to vanish, in the seventies, underground com-

DANIEL CLOWES

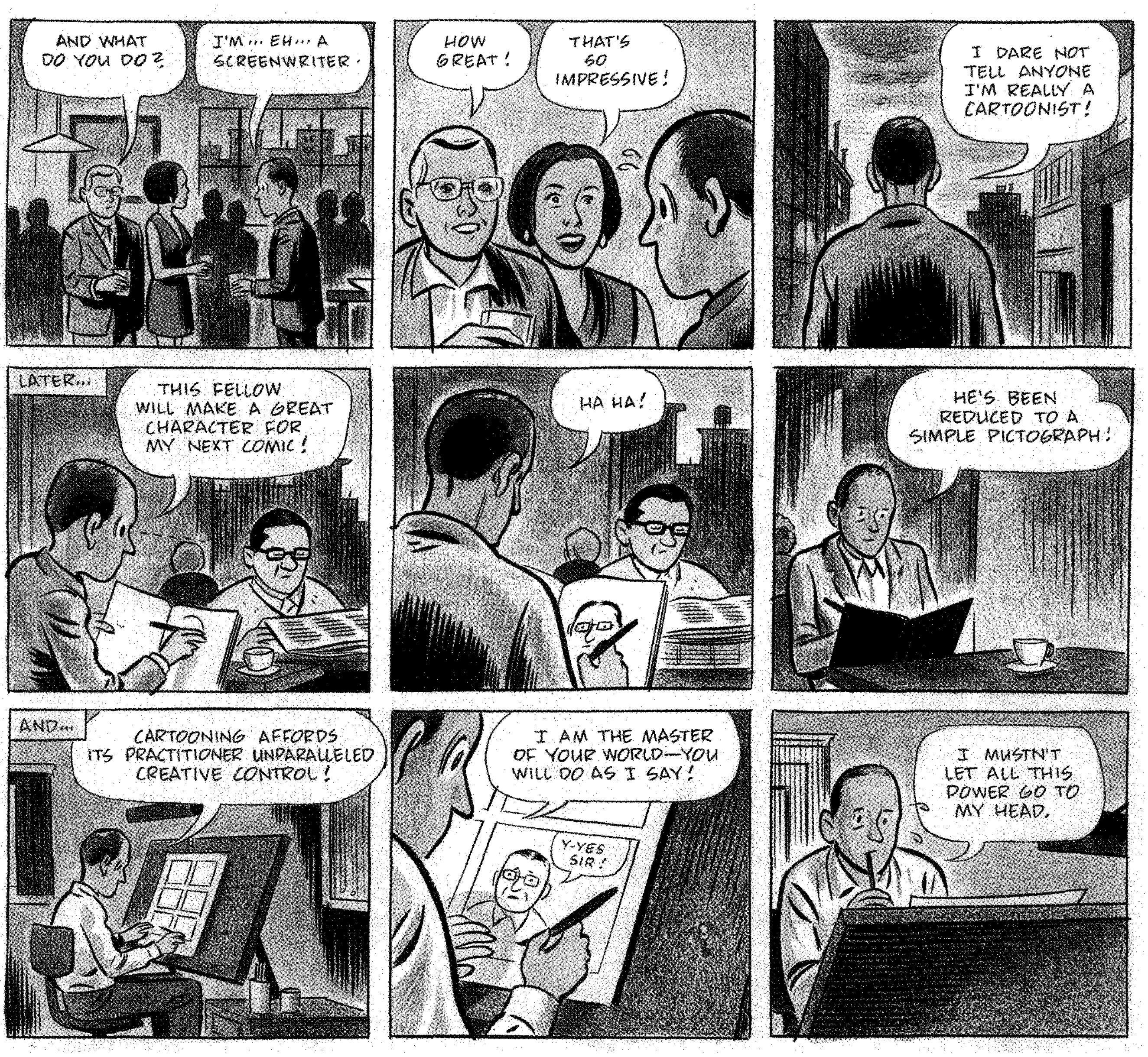
ics petered out, too. It wasn't until the eighties that another generation of artists came of age in such anthologies as Crumb's "Weirdo" and Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's "RAW." Dan Clowes, Chris Ware, and the brothers Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez were influenced by everything from "Peanuts" to punk rock and magic realism, and their memoir-like narratives have raised the medium to a new art form. But many of the country's best artists, most of whom are published by the Seattle-based Fantagraphics Books, sell fewer than five thousand copies of their comics.

Towering over both generations is Crumb, whose thick, crosshatched line, gleefully corrosive fantasies about women with sturdy legs and huge behinds, and hostility to every species of American boor and boob are etched in the brains of his many protégés.

Clowes's stories are dreamlike and disturbing, set in Hopperesque bars and motels where lonely men are haunted by nightmares, rumors of the Apocalypse, and unslaked sexual desires. He has a way of pacing the reader with, say, five consecutive panels that have five-line word balloons, and then offering up a silent panel in which we behold for five beats—by rhythmic habit—a pain-racked face, often Clowes's own.

What particularly distinguishes Clowes is his gem cutter's touch with language. In "Why I Hate Christians," a two-page riff, the pancake-headed narrator demonstrates how "touchy" Christians are by standing in front of a church and shouting, "Hey, do me a favor—ask Jesus to come out here and *blow me*!" A female worshipper responds, "I—I feel faint . . . ," and an outraged man bellows, "I pity your soul!" But Clowes gives self-reproach equal time. In the last panel, a devil's-advocate character points to a granny reading her Bible on a porch and says, "So, this little old lady who never hurt a fly—do you hate her?"

"Ghost World," Clowes's 1998 graphic novel about Enid and Becky, two disaffected recent high-school graduates who mock everyone as "pseudo-Bohemian" losers, has just been made into a movie starring Thora Birch and Steve Buscemi. The book is perhaps the keenest and most affecting portrayal of


AND WHAT DO YOU DO?
I'M ... EH ... A SCREENWRITER.
HOW GREAT!
THAT'S SO IMPRESSIVE!
I DARE NOT TELL ANYONE I'M REALLY A CARTOONIST!
LATER...
THIS FELLOW WILL MAKE A GREAT CHARACTER FOR MY NEXT COMIC!
HA HA!
HE'S BEEN REDUCED TO A SIMPLE PICTOGRAPH!
AND...
CARTOONING AFFORDS ITS PRACTITIONER UNPARALLELED CREATIVE CONTROL!
I AM THE MASTER OF YOUR WORLD—YOU WILL DO AS I SAY!
Y-YES SIR!
I MUSTN'T LET ALL THIS POWER GO TO MY HEAD.

"I told a friend I was going on a date with Dan Clowes, and he said, 'Are you serious? That guy is sick!'" Clowes's wife, Erika, said.

adolescence since "The Catcher in the Rye." Alternative comics are almost entirely written for, and by, men, and this makes Clowes's tender act of ventriloquism, in which we see Enid and Rebecca clinging to each other even as the unwelcome onset of adulthood and sex drive them apart, even more astonishing.

Matt Groening, the creator of "The Simpsons," calls "Ghost World" "a masterpiece in comic form." But most of America has never heard of it. "The tragedy of comics," says Michael Chabon, the author of "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay," a recent novel about the history of comics, "is that they have thrown up one genius after another, but that fact never seems to fill the cup of public estimation. When people believe they're thinking of the *medium* of comics, they're actually thinking of certain *genres*—of superhero comics, or Archie and Betty."

Cartoonists often find a measure of acceptance worse than being ignored. Robert Crumb hated the 1972 movie of his "Fritz the Cat" series so much that in a subsequent comic strip he had an ostrich woman dispatch Fritz with an icepick to the head. And he was so annoyed about being recognized on the street after the 1994 documentary "Crumb"—which recounted how he masturbated to his own comics, and how, as a child, he had been sexually aroused by Bugs Bunny—that he got rid of his trademark fedora and glasses and grew a long beard.

With the film of "Ghost World" opening, Clowes is bracing himself for that same kind of merciless attention. The screenplay was written by Clowes and Terry Zwigoff, and directed by Zwigoff—who also directed "Crumb"—and last month the two men attended its première at the Seattle International Film Festival. Clowes spoke briefly to introduce the film, and noticed Zwigoff cackling in the wings. "You looked like an uncomfortable ghoul," the director told him afterward. "You were dying."

"I didn't realize I had this droning monotone," Clowes told me. "That my jokes weren't funny and that I stared at my shoes the whole time." He experienced the evening as a sustained discordant shriek. "We got out of the limo and there were thirty Rupert Pupkins clawing at Thora Birch, which was fascinating but horrifying. Everyone loved the movie, but afterward there was this feeling of 'O.K., we've just been entertained by that! But that was ten minutes ago! How are you going to entertain us next?' " He sighed. "The whole thing made me even more misanthropic, if possible."

Clowes lives with his wife, Erika, and their guinea pigs, Hotdog and Snoppy, in a modest clapboard house in Oakland's funky Grand Lake district. The former tenants were half-assed Satanists, so a pentagram can be discerned in the sidewalk out front, but only when it rains. Clowes arises at about midday and answers mail in his pajamas and slippers. Toward evening, he puts on his old-man outfit and shuffles into his studio, which is neatly crowded with his collections of stuffed college mascots and lurid old paperbacks, like "Dead as a Dummy" and "Dig a Dead Doll." He sits in front of a slab of white Bristol Board and pencils and inks laboriously until four in the morning. Then he gets back into his pajamas, lies in bed, and awaits his chronic insomnia.

One day a few weeks ago, Clowes and I were talking in his studio when he excused himself and went to the bathroom. Erika slipped into the room and sat in his chair for a few minutes before going off to teach at Berkeley, where she is writing a doctoral thesis on anality in modernism. She is an engaging woman, with a tattoo of a squid on her right calf, and was wearing a sleeveless black sweater, a gray skirt, and barrettes in her short brown hair. "Dan and I met at a comic-book signing in 1992," she began, "when I asked him to autograph a pair of my underpants for my sort-of boyfriend, a huge Clowes fan." Erika was nineteen; Clowes was thirty, and separated from his wife. "I had thought, Comics—it's nerds, it's heavy people, he'll be the definition of 'other.' Then I saw Dan, and he was very attractive and subterranean. There was something in his eyes, and I thought, There are hidden things to be discovered about you. I picked my underpants out of my purse, and Dan thought it was his rock-star moment." Clowes embellishes his autograph with a drawing for attractive young women, but he limits himself to a signature with the great majority of his fans, the pimply and problematic young men. "He was dejected when he realized he had to sign them to this guy."

Clowes came back and looked around uncertainly. Erika was in his chair, and I was sitting on the chaise where she likes to lie in the afternoons and pepper him with questions, which he slowly answers while he draws and listens to talk radio. He took up a tense perch on a stool. "We flirted a little, and I gave him my number," Erika said. "I was wearing a fluorescent-green square-dancing dress, and he thought I was a hippie."

"A good kind of hippie," Clowes said. "Not dirty and gross—just a dabbler."

"It was my Enid phase," she said, referring to the caustic, shapely heroine of "Ghost World." "Like Crumb, Dan finds bossy women both terrifying and arousing. He likes the idea of relinquishing control to a giantess." Clowes looked on blankly. Erika continued, "I told a friend I was going on a date with Dan Clowes, and he said, 'Are you serious? That guy

SNAP

With a quick little shudder the bushes part and offer a wren to my eyes,
Who stops there, seemingly intent on the strains of Mozart's Symphony
Number Twenty-nine—an early piece composed by a boy in love with Italy
As the wren's coal-speck eyes are in love, it seems, with that splash of light
Greening the grass and, before its face, the scarlet dangle of a fuchsia skirt
With its purple lining. It is that nib-specific *focus* I am watching in the bird
And hearing in the music, the *radically contingent* presence things have
In the moment to moment passage of their happening, the wholehearted
Way they are in a state made up of bristling force and chaste patience—
Which stars have, and shaken sycamore leaves, and the seeds of lightning.

—*Eamon Grennan*

is sick! He's a sick fuck! You better be careful.'" The friend may have been thinking of Clowes's character Tina, a potato-and-fish-shaped mutant woman who rolls around panting, "I'm ready for you to do it!" as her intended lover looks on, repulsed.

Like any artist or adolescent, Clowes both avoids attention and demands it. As his wife talked about him, he seemed to wink off like an old television screen, collapsing to a single point of light. Later, Erika told me that Dan "vacillates, as cartoonists do, between feeling, 'I am a god, the best in my field!,' flying into tirades if people make slight driving errors, and extreme self-loathing, when he says, 'I'm a complete failure.' This makes him bearable and charming."

In Clowes's early work, which he collected in the books "Orgy Bound" and "Lout Rampage!," he treated his characters like garage-sale curiosities. Having spent four years at Pratt, in New York, he turned around and drew "Art School Confidential," a biting treatise about why no one should ever go to art school. Throughout the eighties and early nineties, his comics were deft jabs at various saps, schmoes, dweebs, dorks, and spazzes. Everything was, "Ha-ha—die, you shit," Art Spiegelman says.

Increasingly—and at the expense of some of his earlier fans—Clowes has turned to longer and more emotional narratives. In "Ghost World," the personal connection to his characters is clear: "Enid Coleslaw" is an anagram for "Daniel Clowes," and "Rebecca Doppelmeyer" shares his great-grandmother's last name. At one point in the book, Enid decides that her idol, "David Clowes [*sic*] . . . this famous cartoonist," is the man for her. She goes to a signing to meet him, sees him—a pervy-looking guy sitting alone at a table—and slinks off. "I thought it only fair that Enid get to judge me the way she judges everything else," Clowes told me. "That I not get to be the silent friend ingratiating myself into the world of these teen-age girls, not get to imply that they thought I was cool because I was drawing them." Seeing my expression, he looked baffled himself, and laughed. "It's a really crazy thing, now that I articulate it."

Like her creator, Enid judges popular culture harshly, as the lame, insidious, and infuriating creation of marketing experts. When Enid loses her virginity, "The Jeffersons" is playing in the background, and she nearly cracks up at the juxtaposition. (It's no accident that the panels in "Ghost World" are all tinted with the blue light that television casts in a darkened room.) At the supermarket, Enid holds up a box of Mallow Tweens and, as Rebecca frantically shushes her, declares, "Are they really so *desperate* to sell cookies that they have to show a big dick going into a cunt on the package?"

Clowes seems to like only two cultural phenomena: good comics, and the way everything was before, and just after, he was born. "With the exception of nineteen-seventies punk," he said, "it's all been downhill since 1966." He then backtracked with equal assurance, and said that he admires the work of David Lynch ("I even liked 'Lost Highway' "), Stanley Kubrick ("I was the one guy who liked 'Eyes Wide Shut' "), and Vladimir Nabokov ("Even the last book that everyone hated, 'Look at the Harlequins!' "). He added, "I also have high hopes for 'The Sopranos,' never having seen it."

Authentic art, Clowes believes, comes mainly from an individual's unconscious, from strong memories and fears and wishes—and, particularly, dreams. When he was working on "Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron," Clowes tried out Salvador Dali's notion of taking catnaps and then writing down his disoriented thoughts. The book is packed with surreal oddities: a dog with no orifices; a "Clothes Exchange" where employees impound your garments and make you wear someone else's; a spooky, smiley-face-with-a-porkpie-hat design that conspiracy theorists see carved everywhere, even in a highly magnified photo of Hitler's neck. Clowes's narratives are full of anagrams and rebuses, clues (a wand, an eye, a movie camera) to an underlying mystery that is never solved.

"You look through cartoonists' work and you can see into their childhoods," Clowes told me as we sat in his studio. He picked up a pencil and pad, stared at me, and started sketching in rapid dabs. "The Hernandez brothers have five or six characters in every panel. In my work, every room is empty."

Clowes was born in April, 1961, in an unseasonal Chicago snowstorm. His parents divorced when he was a toddler, and he stayed in a different house every night, sometimes going to sleep at his father's house and waking up at his mother's, having been carried across the street while he slept. His much older brother, James, had left behind a pile of old comics at his mother's place, and

"So if you're the best man at a gay wedding, is that like being first runner-up?"

Dan obsessively copied out his favorite pulp images well before he could read. "I was convinced my brother had left some message for me in that pile that would help me solve the odd puzzle that was my childhood," he said. "But I was also really scared of some of the comics, and I took the one where Superman becomes evil and has an evil, sickly grin and I hid it under a box for years. "

As an adolescent, Clowes says he had no dates and few friends. He was a classic pre-cartoonist: one of those mopey kids who sit in the back of class nurturing revenge fantasies in which bullies cower, prom queens melt, and the world kowtows to their stupendous genius. "If I felt anxious or threatened by someone," Clowes said, "I'd look at the person and figure out the caricature that would most devastate them, like emphasizing a mole on a girl who probably spent all night staring at the mirror thinking, If only I didn't have this mole. Later on, as an adult, I could tell from someone's affect what their emotional problem was, what made them insecure."

Clowes was now bent completely over the sketch pad on his lap, although he occasionally shot me a piercing glance. I began to feel nervous. The novelist Michael Chabon, who lives near Clowes, had told me, "I blanch around Dan, because I imagine how I must appear under his gamma-ray eyeballs, his all-seeing gaze."

Clowes loves drawing beads of sweat on foreheads. "It instantly changes someone into a seething criminal with a secret," he said. But he is trying to rely on that device less and less, and he is also minimizing the number of his characters who smoke cigarettes, which he feels is too glib a way of indicating detachment. In his latest book, "David Boring," Clowes experimented with draining his characters of facial expression, Speed Racer style. He seems to worry sometimes that his symbolic tools are too powerful and definitive, like a gun with no safety catch.

In Clowes's work, guns go off routinely, usually shooting his protagonist in the head—David Boring takes a bullet not once but twice. "I always have fantasies of getting shot in the head," Clowes told me. "In upsetting situations, or when I have a migraine, it seems like it would be a great relief to shoot myself, or to stick an icepick in my forehead and let all the pressure burst out." He went to the bathroom again, and I stole a look at his sketch pad. He had drawn a pair of bulgy eyes streaked with dozens of tiny cracked-earth veins. If it was me—and I'm afraid it was—then I looked as avid and feral as the creature that lurks under children's beds, waiting to grab them when they get up to go to the bathroom.

The director Terry Zwigoff's house in San Francisco is a mausoleum in which the past is entombed. Heavy drapes block the windows, and only wan shafts of sunlight reveal the nineteen-twenties posters on the walls, the shelves massed with perfectly aligned 78-r.p.m. records, and the pyramids of old tonics and nostrums (Tuxedo Club Pomade, Dr. Hobson's Mentholated Bronchial Wafers). A short man with a graying mustache and patches of absent-minded stubble, dressed in the same kind of old-man clothes that Clowes favors, Zwigoff sat back on a broken-down sofa to explain what he'd done to "Ghost World."

"I wasn't that crazy about Dan's 'Ghost World' comic, to tell you the truth," he said. "I didn't think it was as funny as his other stuff. If Dan has a problem, it's that his work is very derivative of Crumb's—but that meant he had the right angry sensibility for me to work with. I had tried to write screenplays with Crumb, but he just went on for pages about the specific sound a girl's high heel made on linoleum."

In 1996, Clowes and Zwigoff started writing the screenplay of "Ghost World," producing some twenty-five versions over the next two years. Zwigoff introduced a crucial new character named Seymour (played by Steve Buscemi), a sad-sack record collector who wears a support girdle and hates the modern world. The focus of the movie shifted from Enid and Becky to Enid and Seymour, and it became more of a coming-of-age love story. It still feels like a handmade film—there is no thundering plot, just nuanced observations of a few lives in transition—but Zwigoff's world is more elegiac than Clowes's. It's the difference between someone who collects jazz 78s and someone who collects novelty 45s.

"Terry basically used Clowes's comic as a matrix for getting his own ideas across," Robert Crumb told me. "A middle-aged record collector who gets laid by a teen-aged girl is one of Terry's big fantasies."

"I told Dan from the beginning that he was going to hate this film," Zwigoff said, "because there's too much of me in it. In the editing room, Dan was very, very on edge—he eventually had to go home, because the scenes we'd cannibalized from the comic, where the girls stare at the ceiling or hunt for an apartment, were *killing* the film." (Crumb, Zwigoff, and Clowes appear to have the healthiest and most harrowing friendship in the world: no complaint goes unexpressed or unreciprocated.)

But Clowes says he's surprisingly happy with the film. His main worry is that Hollywood has started to call, wanting to adapt his other work. The six-figure sale of "Ghost World" did provide the down payment on his house, but he feels duty-bound to hate and fear the Hollywood-movie version of everything. "I'm tempted to just sell these studios all my stuff," Clowes says. "But then I'd have to move to an island."

He feels safer in the neglected precincts of cartooning, because the form suits his purposes perfectly: comics are unsusceptible to editing and are therefore, as Clowes once wrote, "the ultimate domain of the artist who seeks to wield absolute control." He told me, "In the end, I'm glad comics are beneath the radar. I'm only interested in reaching those few people who can appreciate the subtleties of what I'm trying to do. But it's a very sad life."

The trick, for Clowes, is to preserve that core of sadness against all the regular people who would seek to make him happy. "I've talked about this with Dan, told him to watch out for all the traps," says Robert Crumb, who now lives in France. "It's easy to turn down a beer commercial, but people will offer you half a million for a great-sounding film project, pay you to become their voice. Or you soften your edge to be nice to people who've given you money. Or you become self-conscious, because everyone's demanding the same hit they first got from you, demanding a repeat. Or you decide that you're a great artist who must do something *important*, and you lose the lighthearted spontaneity. And the media is always after you, a horde of locusts, a bottomless pit of needs. It's nothing personal, but the world will tear you down and pull you under." ◆

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

KID PROOF

BY IAN FRAZIER

The day I heard that my wife was going to have a baby, I crossed an internal watershed, a kind of Continental Divide of the spirit, and I knew I would never be the same. I was in front of my apartment complex at the time, sitting on the lawn. A guy I used to know from my old job came walking by, and we were talking about one thing and another. Suddenly, he happened to ask when Nancy's baby was due. The waves of emotion that rushed over me in that instant are difficult to describe. First, I suppose, was an overwhelming sense of wonder—wonder at the power of life, at its simple, unfathomable glory. Along with that came surprise, as I cast back in my mind for clues I might have missed and tried to recall her present address. Then came pride, and a happiness of a sort I had never felt before, all mixed up with anxiety at this new responsibility that I might possibly have. There was a welter of other feelings as well—financial worry, concern for the legal aspects, puzzlement, excitement, even perhaps a moment of terror at the change I could feel taking place inside me. And through it all, and above it all, that enormous feeling of wonder.

Then I had to laugh. My acquaintance was still standing there talking to me, and here I was a million miles away. I always get a kick out of watching my reaction to things. Right then, I decided to keep a journal, to record my emotional growth through this uncharted new region I had entered in my life.

May 5: A week since I first heard the news, and still I lie awake nights saying to myself, "Me, a father (putatively)!" For hours, as the traffic passes outside, my mind examines the idea from every angle. I mean, the last time I saw Nancy was March, and that's not too long ago, and before that we were pretty much together, so I'd have to say that the chances are fairly good—better than sixty-forty, at least. Only Nancy could truly appreciate my thoughts right now—I must get in touch with her. My search begins no farther away than the kitchen counter, where I file the messages that my landlord has been taking for me while I wait for my dispute with the phone company to be resolved. I am quickly rewarded with a handful of scraps of paper with the words "Call Nancy" and a scrawled number. I recall how in the past I always ignored their summons, fearful of reopening old wounds. Now I stuff the scraps in my jacket pocket and rush to the public phone at the arcade.

A male voice answers—an instructor from Lamaze, almost certainly. Then, after an endless moment, Nancy is on the line. Nancy, my Nancy, my woman, my love, with her heart welling up through the familiar music of her voice. Scarcely able to muster breath, I ask her if it's true that we're going to have a baby. She replies that she definitely is pregnant. The mystery of it all bewitches us for a second or two, making us fall silent. Then, like dams finally giving way, we spill forth a stream of questions. She wants to know why I didn't call her before, and if I have the money I owe her, and what I did with her space heater, and how come I never paid my share of something or other—the usual concerns, but infused with new meaning now. Of course, I respond with dizzy inquiries of my own. Then, again, we both fall silent; she because she has hung up, and I because this idea of my (or somebody's) being a dad will take a little getting used to.

July 15: Rushing around like mad preparing for the new baby. I'm on the go constantly from when I wake up, at about noon, until the dinner hour, or later. Kid-proofing my apartment and storage unit was a job that lasted for days. One minute I'm thinking I'd better start using ashtrays, and the next I'm thinking about how to keep them out of tiny hands. I can see how people who are pretty sure they're parents get obsessed with this stuff.

August 9: Pregnancy is a state of mind that affects not just the woman but also the man (assuming I'm him). Along with a powerful nesting impulse that's come over me, I've experienced a change in my diet, accompanied by a craving for strange foods. These days, I have a taste for pickled hard-boiled eggs, hot-pepper vodka, salty beef jerky, sugar-coated peanuts, strong beef bouillon with vodka, pork rinds, Irish coffee, and rich brandy Alexanders—often in odd combinations. Many days, too, I suffer from nausea and other symptoms of sympathetic morning sickness.

September 1: Saw Nancy coming out of a tanning parlor with a guy, very likely her nutritionist. Remembered I've been meaning to call her and catch up. Felt a surge of affection as I waved from the bus.

October 20: I've become very involved in the new fall lineup of shows, on both network and cable. For the first time, however, my loyalty is split. Yes, I want to watch them all, as I've done in the past. But my thoughts keep wandering to this pregnancy, and to the imminence of my probably being a dad. Already I'm evolving into a different person; my viewing schedule will never have my undivided attention again.

November 15: I want to weep, or stick my head out the window and shout for joy. How powerful, how unfamiliar these feelings are! Just now, as I was leafing through the local paper, I saw it in the "Vital Statistics" column: Nancy's name, and the announcement of the birth of her seven-pound-six-ounce baby boy. I have a son (pending DNA testing)!

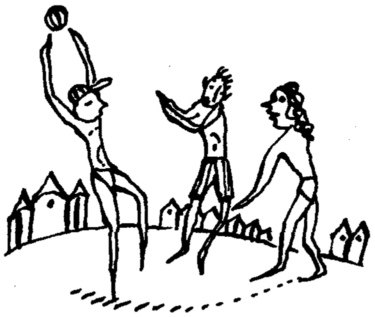
I made a mental note to call Nancy again, A.S.A.P. Or as soon as she's out of the hospital, anyway, which would probably be next week.

November 23: Although constantly repeated, the miracle of a life coming into the world is always new, a blessing and an astonishment every time. However I had imagined myself feeling, I never imagined *this*. It's as if someone took out my heart and shined it up and put it back inside me, better than before. I tried to share my revelations with Nancy's brother Rick when he stopped by today. He only wanted to talk about inconsequential financial business involving some car loan in my and Nancy's name that I defaulted on and they froze her checking account and garnisheed her salary. Somehow the issue of *x* thousand dollars that I may or may not owe seems so meaningless now, especially in light of the wonderful recent events that have happened to me.

November 29: What a pleasure it is to have a baby to shop for! I'm sure that Nancy's parents and other relatives on her side are buying him many things. As my contribution, I decided to get him a special gift that was just for fun. After much looking, I settled on a small plastic container of anise-flavored toothpicks. He won't appreciate them until he's older, but he'll be glad he has them then. And for myself I splurged on—what else?—a big Costa Rican cigar and a couple of cartons of Pall Malls, since I was at the store anyway.

December 3: Spotted Nancy at a back table at the corner bistro in close confab with a guy—possibly the author and pediatric-medicine expert Dr. T. Berry Brazelton. Wanted to go over and join them, but thought better of the idea. What could I add to their discussion, after all? As the mother, Nancy is far better informed about the baby's medical history than I. The simple fact is, Nancy is the most important person in that kid's world right now, regardless of what I or the actual father, if it isn't me, may feel.

December 11: Among the greatest experiences in a man's life has to be the moment when "his" baby smiles at him for the first time. That epiphany just happened to me, leaving me dazzled, humbled, and in awe. I was in the parking lot at Price Chopper and I saw a baby in an infant-restraining seat in the back of what I took to be Nancy's car. I stopped and admired the child through the window and made a silly face, and there it was—a smile. The child sort of seemed to be smiling and crying simultaneously, if that's possible. I think he has my eyes, or one of them.



December 14: I'm exhausted. The last few nights, I've been up at all hours, walking the floor and feeding. I hate to think how much tireder I'd be if I were taking care of a baby. I can tell that this experience is aging me—but in a good way. Early this morning, I was relaxing in a night spot, and suddenly I couldn't believe the words I heard coming out of my mouth. Turning to the server, I offhandedly remarked, "I'll have one more round, please, and a six-pack to go." As the sentence replayed in my mind, the realization hit me: I sounded just like my own father (or the guy who used to say he was)! Without consciously trying or knowing I was doing it, I had become him, somehow; now the words of that beloved long-dead or moved-away person had been officially handed on to me.

March 12: Had to go to West Virginia for a few months, and so got behind in this. After all I'd been through, I needed to recharge my batteries. I believe that everyone who has the burdens of child care should do the same. You need to make time that's just for you. Stop for a moment, sit down, lean your head back, put a damp washcloth over your eyes, let the problems of the day flow out your limbs, take a bus to Clarksburg, and find an inexpensive motel room. Three or four months later, you'll be back on your feet and ready to go. In my case, I have returned full of eagerness to plunge into domestic duties again. Pretty soon, I definitely will give Nancy a call.

Seventeen years later: Found this notebook while throwing out some junk. Time goes by so quickly! How long ago was it, I wonder, that I saw a smiling baby through a car window and felt the pride of almost-a-hundred-per-cent-certain fatherhood bring tears to my eyes? It could have been an eternity, or just yesterday. Now that baby I admired is a full-grown man with an important job in a factory and a wife and baby and beautiful home, probably, for all I know. Nancy, perhaps now a plump and cheery grandmother, does not live in this town anymore, because I haven't seen her around. People say that the hardest thing to learn with kids and other loved ones is letting go. But, no matter how difficult it may be, still it can be done, as my own example proves. ♦

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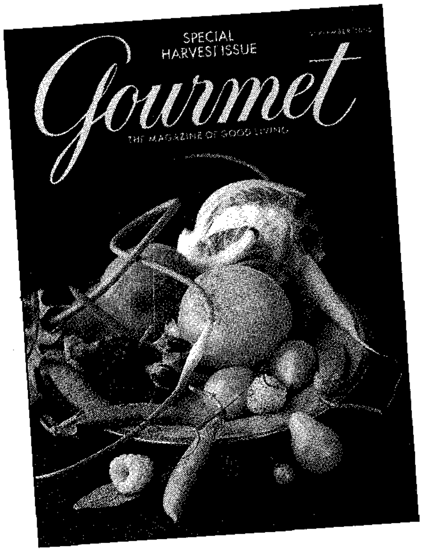

ANNALS OF SCIENCE

SLICE OF LIFE

How a convicted killer's corpse brought anatomy into the digital age.

BY GORDON GRICE

The district attorney who prosecuted Joseph Paul Jernigan called him "a middle-of-the-road killer"—a rougher character than some he'd dealt with, but definitely not the roughest. "I've got two other guys on death row now who'd eat Jernigan alive," he told me. Newspapers called Jernigan a "former mechanic"; he was also a thief, who had already done time for burglary twice when his real troubles began.

It was 1981. Jernigan was twenty-seven. He was living with his wife in Waco, Texas, and they needed money. Jernigan and an acquaintance, a seventeen-year-old called Roy Lamb, decided to go to nearby Navarro County to rob someone. They chose a farmhouse near Dawson. Though they had been smoking marijuana and drinking, the robbery went smoothly. They took a microwave oven and a radio. But, as they drove down the dirt road leading away from the house, they passed the man whose home they'd just ransacked. Edward Hale was seventy-five years old and his eyesight was failing; it's unlikely that he could have identified the burglars or their vehicle, but Jernigan didn't know that. He turned back to eliminate the witness. At the house, Jernigan bludgeoned Hale with an ashtray, stabbed him repeatedly, and then fired at him three times with a shotgun, hitting him in the stomach, the heart, and, finally, the head.

When Joseph Paul Jernigan was executed, he had no idea that his would become the most intimately known body in the world.

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A day or two later, Jernigan's wife went to the police, and Jernigan was taken into custody, where he confessed. Roy Lamb was sentenced to thirty years and paroled after ten; Jernigan went to death row in Huntsville. Once he was incarcerated and free of drugs and alcohol, he started a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous for death-row inmates. He made jewelry and furniture for friends on the outside. He wrote reflective letters. "I have no one to blame but myself," he admitted. As his first execution date approached, he told a reporter, "I'm very scared. I catch myself counting the days. It's hard for me to sleep at night." The district attorney remembers Jernigan as generally impassive in the courtroom, but when a judge told him the final date of his execution he fought his guards and had to be restrained.

On August 4, 1993, Jernigan refused to eat the last meal he had requested—cheeseburgers, fries, a salad—and just after midnight he went to the death chamber. A needle was threaded into his forearm, and he was injected with the sedative sodium thiopental, a heart-stopping dose of potassium chloride, and pancuronium bromide, a muscle relaxant meant to collapse the lungs. As a gesture of atonement, he had agreed to donate his body to medical science, but this chemical cocktail would render his organs toxic and unsuitable for transplant. He offered no last words, and was pronounced dead at 12:31 A.M.

Few people who donate their bodies to science know exactly what will happen to their remains. Most often, their cadavers will be dissected by medical students learning anatomy. There would have been no way for Jernigan to guess that, even before he died, his body was coveted for a far more elaborate purpose.

After his family had taken their leave, Jernigan's body was "lightly embalmed"—that is, infused with a little formaldehyde to counteract the corrosive effect of the injections—packed into a crate, and air-freighted to Denver. There scientists contracted by a government agency called the National Library of Medicine gave the body MRIs and CTs, as if it were a living patient. Then they froze it solid.

Jernigan's was only one of several corpses in cold storage whose radiological images the scientists were comparing. They were looking for an average man, someone who fit certain parameters for size and age and health. They had had a hard time finding an appropriate cadaver; most bodies donated to science are old and emaciated or show signs of disease or trauma. Others that might have been ideal had lost their freshness by the time they became available to the scientists. Jernigan had an advantage: because he had died on a schedule, his remains had been handled according to the scientists' needs. His deficiencies were minor—a testicle and an appendix lost in operations years earlier, a missing tooth. In the end, he was chosen.

After sawing the body into four pieces, the scientists encased the chunks in blue gelatine and began to slice, milling from the feet to the head. They made 1,877 cuts. After each cut, they digitally photographed a cross-section. The process took months, because the team could work for no more than eight hours before having to put the corpse back in the freezer. By the time they were done, Jernigan's body had been reduced to ooze and ice shavings.

The scientists collated the photos with the CT scans they'd made earlier. They brought the resulting data to life with the three-dimensional-imaging technology used in "Star Wars." These digital images were more detailed and realistic than the models and illustrations in traditional anatomy texts, because they were generated not from abstractions of the human form but from the thing itself, captured on camera. After months of work, the scientists emerged with fifteen gigabytes of data that constituted the Visible Human Male, the most accurate human anatomical model ever seen.

It may be hard to grasp what had become of Jernigan, but it's easy to see. His image is on thousands of Web sites. I first saw it at a computer terminal in a university library in Oklahoma. I watched Jernigan's upright body approach and pass through the plane of the computer screen, a smooth progression of glistening cross-sections. When I chose another angle, I could move from head to foot, the image kaleidoscoping—a blossoming of brain, a constriction of neck, a widening into the trunk packed with organs, a sudden bifurcation at the pelvis, and on down to the surprisingly dainty toes. I examined individual segments of his body. They resembled cuts of beef—or, given their symmetry, butterflied pork chops. They had the sleek look of something wrapped in cellophane. The cross-section of Jernigan's thighs and genitalia reminded me of a lava lamp—bubbles in a viscous liquid. Though the image would stay still as long as I liked, it seemed evanescent, on the verge of transforming into something else.

An argument at the next terminal distracted me. A thin student in a T-shirt and baggy jeans had been caught printing out photos of nude women. The librarian chastised him with remarks like "What made you think you could do something like this?" and "Didn't you realize we can monitor whatever you're looking at?" I wondered whether some hidden authority was monitoring my examination of a stranger's testicle. Would such an authority see this electronic body as an abstraction or recognize it as human flesh? Which would be worse?

At the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, I performed my first operation. I felt my scope sliding along the bone. I was seeing structures I'd previously known only by name, from news stories about football players' knee injuries. The white pad of cartilage beneath my hand was the meniscus. The twist of fibrous tissue was the anterior cruciate ligament (the ACL). Then my scope slipped off the bone and I was floating free in the fluid at the joint. I aimed through the white architecture of bones to explore the ACL. Suddenly, without feeling any resistance, I plunged straight through the ligament, crippling my patient for life. My patient—an electronic one based on Jernigan—existed only in the memory of a computer, and the equipment that allowed me to operate worked on the same principle as a flight simulator. The palpable hardness of the bones was supplied by a robot

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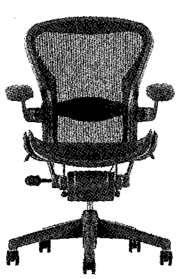

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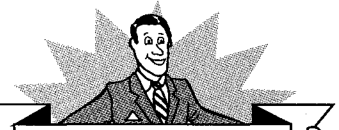

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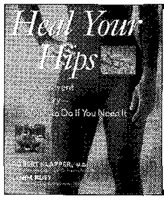

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arm pushing against me as the computer directed. I watched my progress on a monitor, just as a surgeon does when using a real scope, and, because the monitor's image was projected onto a screen beneath my hand, I could actually look down and see the knee where I felt it.

There was, of course, a reason for the extravagant treatment of Jernigan's remains. The scientists who remodelled both him and, later, a fifty-nine-year-old woman who had died of heart disease and lung disease have made the resulting sets of data freely available, and they have become a tool for an endless array of applications. They have prompted the development of surgical simulators, such as the machine I used in Colorado. They can replace cadavers in anatomy classes like one I visited in a rural nursing school in Kansas. They can be used in the designing of prosthetic limbs. Car manufacturers have taken the data in the hopes of creating virtual crash-test dummies. Lawyers have used them to illustrate injuries in court cases. Special-effects companies have adapted the data to lend verisimilitude to animation in commercials and short sequences in movies. And the Department of Defense is working toward using the models to simulate the effects of non-lethal weapons on the body. Soon, one scientist told me, doctors will combine the data with MRI or CT images of particular patients. "Your doctor will practice on a virtual you," he said, pointing emphatically to my sternum. Since such images are transmissible, doctors could also get long-distance help from specialists anywhere in the world.

We live in a time when it's possible for almost anyone to look inside the bodies of anonymous people and, occasionally, of people with names. Cable television, CD-ROMs, and the Internet have made anatomy a popular diversion. The singer Carnie Wilson's stomach-reduction operation was advertised as a Web event, and it is fairly easy to witness other surgeries online, from the refurbishing of a cornea to a heart bypass. Not long ago, I watched a television documentary in which a medical examiner displayed a photograph of a murder victim's stomach, sliced open to reveal the corn and hamburger remnants that constituted a last meal and an important clue.

In this climate of public intimacy, it's hard to appreciate the depths of mystery that the human form once held. Though the science of anatomy has ancient roots, most cultures have an equally ancient taboo against observing the interior of the body, except in certain highly controlled contexts. Egyptian embalming techniques, for instance, required that a corpse's belly be sliced open and the viscera removed, but the priest who performed this task was then chased out of the room and cursed, a ceremonial acknowledgment of transgression. Even the limited forms of surgery performed in ancient Greece occurred in a state of relative anatomical ignorance. Although Aristotle was able to dissect monkeys and other animals for educational purposes, the Greeks of his era found human dissection inconceivable. He was forced to deduce what he could about human anatomy by analogy and by observing emaciated people, whose veins and bones stood out well enough to be mapped.

Human dissection was first practiced in the third century B.C. in Alexandria, where the invading Greeks had fewer scruples about using the bodies of natives. Physicians like Erasistratus and Herophilus cut into the corpses and occasionally, according to some sources, the living bodies of foreigners and criminals. (Executed criminals have been a source for anatomical study ever since.) The most important figure in early anatomy is, of course, Galen, a Greek physician of the second century A.D., who studied human dissection in Alexandria. After leaving Egypt, he worked on animal carcasses—lions, bears, oxen, goats, and pigs. Even better were monkeys, whose parts he found to have "an exact similarity" to those of humans. He also studied the gaping wounds of gladiators, though he acknowledged that this method was not practical for most students.

After Galen, anatomical study stagnated for almost a millennium. Constrained by the Christian view that the interior of the human body was "God's province," doctors concentrated on herbal medicine and other strategies that didn't require much knowledge of anatomy. Medical procedures that necessitated physical contact between healer and patient—lancing boils, bleeding with leeches, even minor surgery—were typically handled by barbers, and medical schools taught anatomy as a theoretical subject, if at all. Then, in the thirteenth century, the legal systems in Europe began to sanction autopsies to determine the causes of death, and some universities revised their curricula to include anatomical demonstrations using criminals' corpses. These demonstrations often featured a professor reading from a text while a junior academic pointed to the relevant body parts and a barber handled the cadaver. Medical students stocked the dissection rooms with rose water and incense to mask the smell. At some universities, only medical students and doctors were allowed in; elsewhere, dissections were open to anyone who could pay the admission fee. At the University of Bologna, dissections took place at carnival time, and by the seventeenth century the proceedings had come to resemble freak shows more than scientific investigations.

During the Renaissance, the Church began to shift toward the idea that understanding anatomy could enhance man's appreciation of God's handiwork. This position influenced the arts, and painters began flaying cadavers in order to study their muscles and thereby depict the body with greater accuracy. Leonardo da Vinci observed such flayings and later conducted his own research. He boasted that he had whittled away "more than ten" cadavers just to diagram the circulatory system. But the most influential anatomist of the Renaissance was Andreas Vesalius. His extraordinary texts are filled with innovative cross-references and illustrations—some possibly provided by Titian—and they expose the weaknesses in works by Galen and others.

About two hundred years ago, dissection went back underground, or, at least, into the academy and the hospital, rarely to be observed by laymen. This change, which presaged the rise of the funeral industry, was part of a general cultural trend toward hiding the uglier facts of life, and, except for fictional glimpses of dissection—in works such as Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" and Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body Snatcher"—the human interior remained more or less the province of the medical establishment until the end of the twentieth century.

Though it was information technology that brought about the Visible Human Project, other recent innovations have reawakened public interest in anatomy. In the late nineteen-

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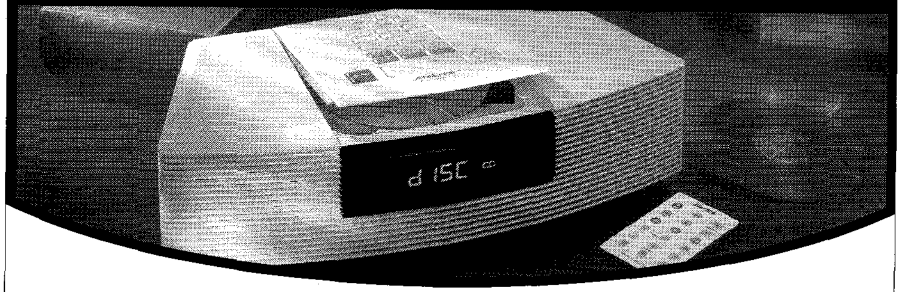

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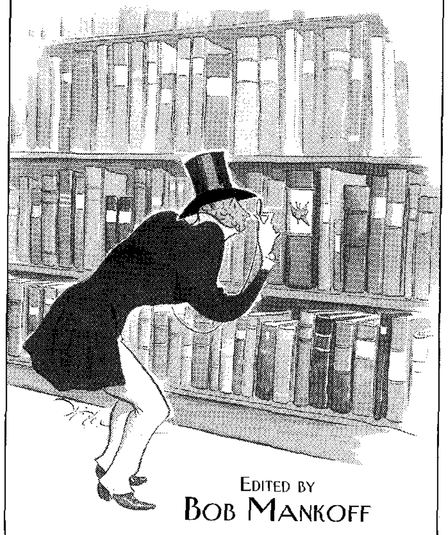

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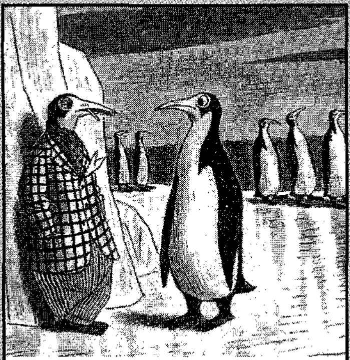
"I just got damn well fed up with being formal all the time."

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seventies, Dr. Gunther von Hagens, an East German refugee who was then associated with the University of Heidelberg, developed a new method for preserving human tissue. He replaced the cell water and soluble fat in human flesh with polymers, a process of infusion which left the tissues almost unchanged in appearance. Such "plastinated" organs and body sections soon turned up in medical and mortuary schools. Skeletons had long been available for study, and organs had been pickled or encased in plastic blocks, but von Hagens made it possible for any medical facility to have a supply of the necessary specimens, suitable for handling. They could be made flexible or firm, depending on the formula used in the infusion process, and, unlike specimens preserved by other methods, von Hagens's retained the shape and color of living organs. Von Hagens estimated that flesh treated this way would last for at least a hundred thousand years.

Nobody objected to von Hagens's anatomical specimens as long as they were used in a scientific setting. The trouble started when von Hagens discovered what he calls "gestalt plastination"—a method of infusing whole bodies—and began posing corpses and displaying them in exhibitions at science museums in Europe and Japan, where they have drawn millions of viewers. One of his works is a man who has been skinned and split longitudinally, his separate muscular halves standing a foot or so apart. His brain and spinal column are propped between the halves, with the eyeballs and the lungs attached in the appropriate places. The rest of the viscera have been removed from their usual positions for clearer viewing: the man holds them in his hands. Although it resembles sculpture, this is an actual human body. Another is a man posed as if running, his muscles peeled open—like bouquets of flowers, as their creator describes the effect—to show underlying structures. A third is a skinned woman with her womb opened to show the five-month-old fetus she was carrying when she died. On average, at least one spectator faints per day at von Hagens's installations. As public events, they have more in common with Robert Mapplethorpe's photography or Damien Hirst's formaldehyde cows than with the standard practice of anatomy.

In Germany, religious leaders pressured politicians to stop the shows. "He who styles human corpses as a so-called work of art no longer respects the importance of death," the Catholic theologian Johannes Reiter proclaimed. Fellow-anatomists asserted that the exhibits were too complex for laymen and therefore could serve no educational purpose. But most of the critics, von Hagens told me recently, had not actually seen his exhibitions. His defense of his work took on political overtones. "It's democratic," he said. "The layman is given back what he lost two hundred years ago"—a view of human anatomy uncensored by experts. Von Hagens referred to his own past in Communist East Germany; his current work, he said, is a form of "body liberation." He described rowdy teen-agers who arrive at his exhibits looking for grotesque spectacle but then quickly fall silent: "They come to see something ugly. They find themselves anew." After seeing the exhibitions, some viewers decide to donate their own bodies, and von Hagens is generally happy to sign them up.

Both von Hagens's work and the Visible Human Project represent battles in the long war between cultural taboos and scientific advancement. "I think it's fabulous," said Victor Spitzer, the University of Colorado anatomist whose team did the work on Jernigan's body, when I asked him about von Hagens. "And if you're asking about the ethics I still like it."

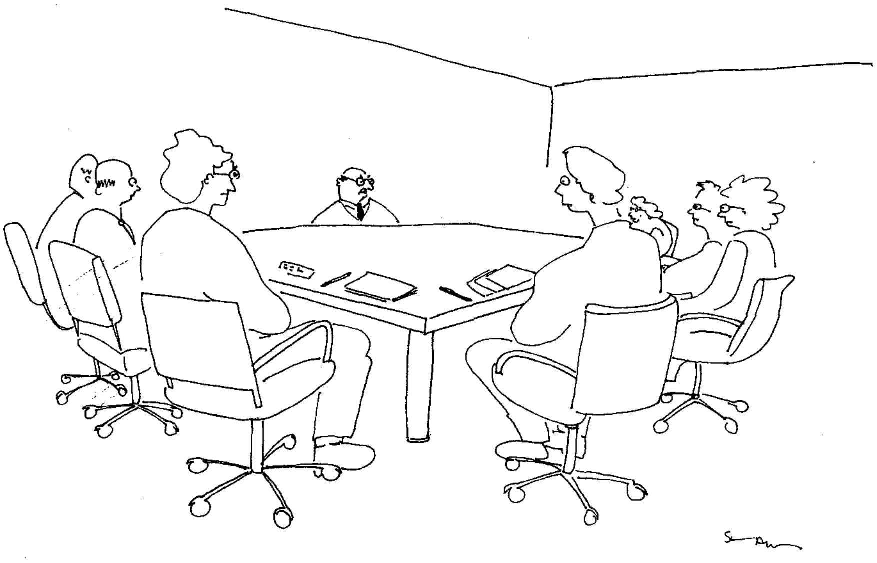
But, unlike von Hagens's subjects, Jernigan had no idea that he would become anything more than an anonymous cadaver. Instead, his body has become the most intimately known in the world. In the eyes of some observers, he has been violated on the largest scale imaginable. His lawyer and friend Mark Ticer told me that Jernigan would have been uncomfortable with the macabre fame he has achieved.

The question of privacy also came up in my conversations with Spitzer. "Someday, this man is going to get up and walk away," he said of an image of Jernigan on a computer screen. The technology to make the Visible Humans move already exists, and it is only a matter of time before they can move so realistically that they could, for example, replace human actors in movies—and become even more convincing than the virtual actors in this month's "Final Fantasy." Hollywood has an incentive to advance the research in this area, and Spitzer suspects that the movie industry may overcome the remaining obstacles before science does. But this is where an unpleasant possibility arises. If the virtual bodies can be used to simulate realistic action, Spitzer said, they can also be used for pornography.

Officials at the National Library of Medicine realized that they wouldn't be able to control the use of public-domain materials, but they did want to preserve the donors' anonymity. They settled for not releasing names. The Visible Human Female remains anonymous. However, when the project was unveiled, people at the N.L.M. revealed when and where the Visible Human Male had been executed, and reporters quickly deduced his identity. The scientists regret having been so specific, and Spitzer still doesn't refer to Jernigan by name.

The research is far from complete. Spitzer hopes to slice his next cadaver much more thinly, improving the resolution by a factor of thirty. He discussed the need for cadavers of every ethnicity, body type, and age. He also showed me a virtual cadaver that hasn't received the publicity that the other two have: a human fetus. I asked Spitzer if he didn't find his line of work a little disturbing. Although he admitted that his first dissection, twelve years ago, was "traumatic," he told me that cadavers generally don't bother him. The job of dismantling Jernigan and his female counterpart was relatively easy. Most of the time, he could see only a frozen surface.

Before Spitzer and his colleagues had announced their odd and thorough dissection of a human being, they feared a backlash; they worried that their work would appear macabre, and they prepared carefully for a press conference at which they emphasized the project's scientific and medical value. A new narrative of Jernigan's afterlife began to develop, an interpretation of his continuing electronic existence as an atonement for his crime: violence redeemed by scientific progress. All of which turned out to be curiously irrelevant. Far from asking difficult questions, many reporters left the press conference early, to cover other breaking news. Those who stayed wrote about the project as a straight science story, and the public has accepted it as ethical under the umbrella of medical authority. This is the paradox of the Visible Humans: people may find them repulsive in theory, but, because they have become electronic, they don't invoke our taboo against dealing with corpses. We can handle them without the defiling touch of flesh and blood. It's as easy as watching TV. ♦



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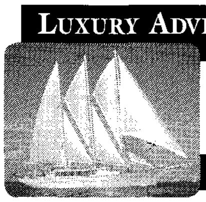

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LETTER FROM KATHMANDU

ROYAL BLOOD

The Crown Prince was in love. Is that what drove him to kill the King and Queen and seven others?

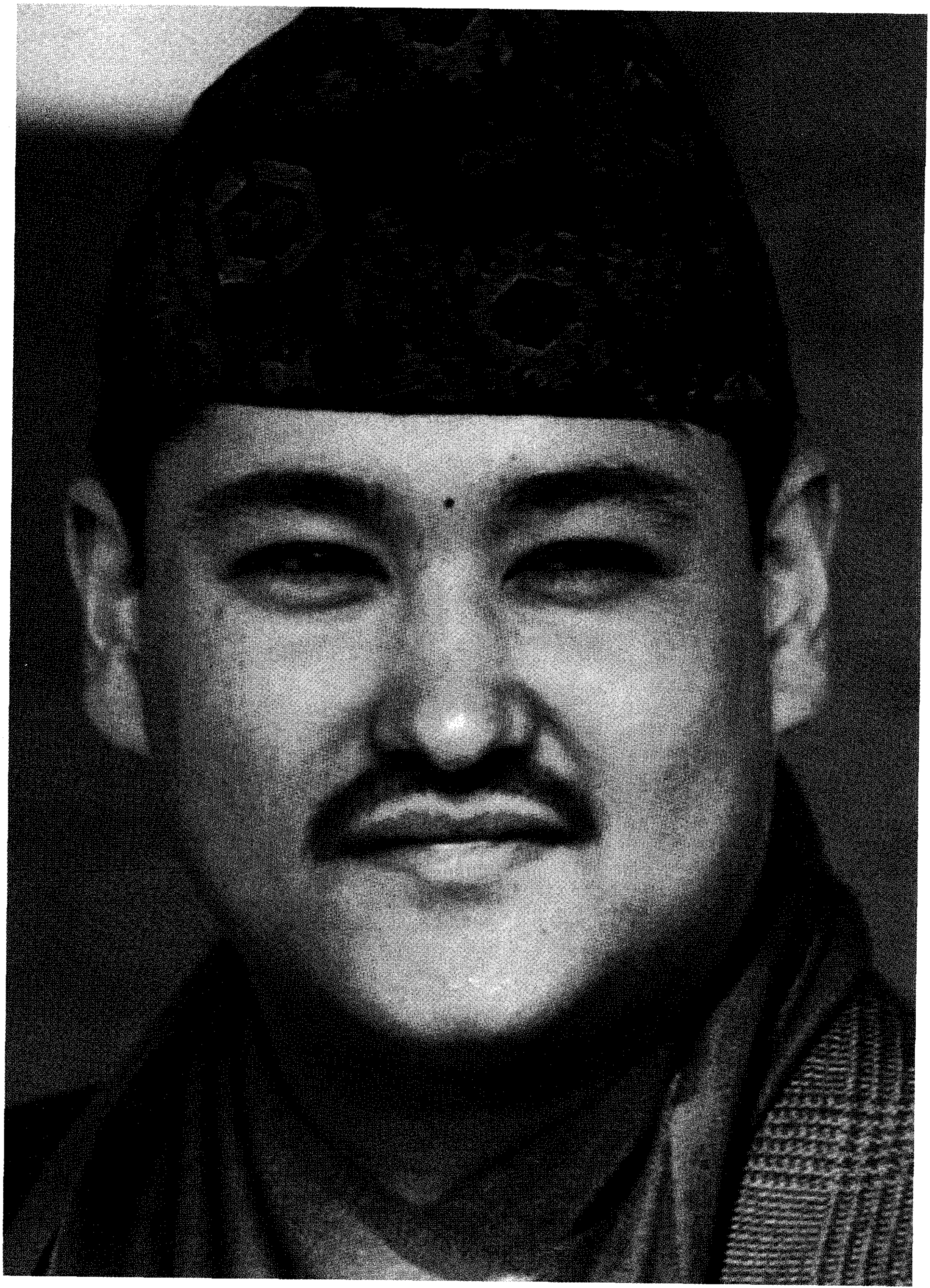
BY ISABEL HILTON

On the evening of Jestha 19 in the year 2058 by the Nepalese calendar—June 1, 2001, as that day was known by the rest of the world—Dr. Upendra Devkota was operating on a patient in his private clinic in Kathmandu, unaware that, a few miles away, King Birendra of Nepal and fourteen members of his family had been shot. Devkota is the country's leading neurosurgeon, and an expert on head injuries; his day job is a badly paid position at the large, overcrowded Bir Hospital, and, like most Nepalese doctors, he supplements it with private practice. Devkota, who is forty-six years old and speaks a precise, fluent English (he was trained in Glasgow, at the Institute of Neurological Sciences, and in London, at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery), told me that he had completed the surgery—a neck operation—and had sat down to discuss the case with a family member of the patient when a deputy surgeon burst into the room and told the relative to leave. The deputy is normally soft-spoken and polite, and the breach of etiquette was startling: the message he delivered brought Devkota to his feet. There had been a disaster, the deputy said. The Crown Prince of Nepal, Dipendra, had been injured by a bullet. Moments later, an aide-de-camp to the royal family appeared on orders to find and fetch Devkota.

The doctor told his deputy to call the members of his surgical team and put them on emergency standby. Devkota knew only that the Crown Prince had a bullet wound, but the fact that they had summoned *him* meant the wound was in the head. He was driven off in an Army jeep at reckless speed, its red lights flashing. (It had already hit two vehicles on its way to Devkota's clinic.) "I thought I was going to have a head injury myself," he said.

The jeep entered the gates of the military hospital, which was crowded with armed soldiers and vehicles. The trauma resuscitation unit was on the ground floor. There was a body on every one of the gurneys, and more casualties lay on the floor. The junior Army doctor on duty that evening was working furiously to resuscitate a patient. Other specialists had been rounded up and were just arriving. A switchboard operator was phoning for blood donors.

TOP: MARILYN SILVERSTONE/MAGNUM; OPPOSITE: BINOD JOSHI/AP WIDE WORLD



King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya at their wedding, in 1970 (opposite); Crown Prince Dipendra was King for only two days.

"They'll thank me—you can't get pigeons like these in Amagansett."

• •

Devkota was shown a man who was bleeding from both ears and whose arms and face were paper white. "I just glanced at him—an older man wearing a pale kurta and pajamas and a Sai Baba locket. The tube was in and they were bagging him"—pumping air into his lungs. "I felt the pulse and was told that they had been bagging him for fifteen minutes. He was lifeless, I said, and rushed on."

The royal physician, Khagendra Shrestha, met Devkota and showed him a stretcher on the floor covered by a sheet. Shrestha pulled it back, and Devkota recognized Queen Aishwarya. He knelt down and put his hands around her head, and it started coming to pieces. The skull had been blown apart. Shrestha was in a state of panic. "The entire royal family," he said, "has been shot."

The King's youngest son, Nirajan, was dead from more than thirty bullet wounds. Shruti, the King's daughter, was in critical condition; her heart was scarcely beating. There were more casualties—eight members of the royal family were to die that night—but Devkota still hadn't seen the Crown Prince, who was on the floor above, in the operating theatre. As the two doctors headed for the stairs, they passed the first patient again. Shrestha identified him. "His Majesty the King," he said.

"I hadn't recognized him," Devkota told me, even though he'd met the King several times. "I felt deeply depressed. I took his pulse and paid my last respects. Then I had to rush on."

Devkota changed into surgical greens. A tube had been inserted into the Crown Prince's mouth, and a team was pumping air into his lungs. A bullet had gone in one temple and out the other, and brain tissue and blood were oozing from the wound. Devkota ordered blood and tested the Prince according to the Glasgow Coma Scale, which runs from fifteen (normal) to three (vegetative). Dipendra scored four: dilated pupils, pain perception, some neurological response. Devkota knew he could neither move the patient nor delay. As he waited for the blood to arrive he phoned his wife. Something terrible had happened, he told her, and almost everybody in the royal family was dead. She should lock the doors and let nobody in. Devkota was in a state of barely suppressed terror. He had no idea what had happened, but three possibilities kept recurring: there had been an Army coup; Maoists had broken into the palace; or there had been some kind of coup involving the Indian secret service. Any one of these possibilities, he knew, would be a catastrophe for Nepal. Whichever it was, he reasoned, the chances were that those responsible were there at the hospital, perhaps among the armed men downstairs. Would they let him try to save the Crown Prince if they had just tried to kill him? He feared for himself and his family.

There were no other injuries to his patient, but there was heavy internal bleeding; there would be brain damage. Devkota cleaned up the wound, insuring that no metal fragments remained inside, and he then removed the damaged tissue. A plastic surgeon closed the exit wound.

Downstairs, people kept arriving. Prema Singh, a relative of the King's by marriage, was met in the parking lot by another distraught member of the royal family. "Dipendra has shot everybody," the sobbing woman said.

The Crown Prince? This was inconceivable. "What rubbish you're talking," Singh snapped.

Inside, Singh found the Queen Mother sitting in an anteroom with the King's aunt, who was weeping. "My baby's gone," the aunt told Singh. "With my own hands I said goodbye." The Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, was in the crowded corridor with Prince Paras, the King's twenty-seven-year-old nephew. Paras was unharmed and was trying to telephone his father, Prince Gyanendra, the brother of the now dead King. Gyanendra was at the royal retreat, in Pokhara, a hundred and twenty miles away. It was raining, and a helicopter had been sent to get him, but the weather had forced it to turn back.

A brain scan of the Crown Prince confirmed bleeding into the ventricles of his brain. He was taken to intensive care, and his head was elevated. He was sedated and given drugs to reduce the swelling. A surgical team was preparing to operate on Gyanendra's wife, and another to operate on the King's youngest brother, Dhirendra, who was badly wounded in the chest. One of the King's sisters was waiting to have two fingers amputated. A cousin and the King's son-in-law had already been moved upstairs to the operating theatre.

By then Devkota had left the theatre and joined a group of doctors in an anteroom. He got a glass of water. He hadn't eaten since lunch and was in a state of nervous exhaustion. It was only then that he heard the first account of what had happened. It was, bizarrely, a relief. "I had been through hours of agony, wondering who had done this. Then one of the doctors said that the rumor was that it had happened at a private event and that the Crown Prince, the man I'd operated on, had done it."

Devkota waited at the hospital until dawn, when it was suggested that he get some rest and return at ten in the morning. But, just as he was about to leave, word came that Prince Gyanendra had at last been brought in by helicopter. Gyanendra was the only member of the royal family in a position to take control. Devkota watched him inspect the casualties wordlessly, his face serious and distressed.

Gyanendra led a group of high officials up to the hospital library and closed the door. Rumors of what had happened were spreading in a ripple of telephone calls that rapidly widened across Kathmandu. By morning, CNN and the BBC were broadcasting the first news—that the Nepalese royal family had been killed at the palace and that Crown Prince Dipendra was believed to be responsible. There had been a dispute, they reported, over whom the Crown Prince was to marry. Crowds gathered at the gates of the royal palace and outside the National Election Commission, where the Royal Privy Council was holding an emergency meeting.

A successor had to be named before the King's death could be made public. Inside the hospital, palace officials were searching for a form of words. Constitutionally, the Crown Prince, Dipendra, was next in line to the throne. But how could they declare King the man who had just killed the King? If Dipendra lived, he would have to be tried, but he would also be King. There was no provision in the Nepalese constitution for trying a king for anything, let alone murder.

Gyanendra sent for Devkota and asked him to describe the Crown Prince's condition. "I told him in clear terms that he was very unwell, and that the outlook was extremely dismal."

Three hours later, on the state radio channels, Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, the chairman of the Royal Privy Council, read a brief statement in a tremulous voice. The King was dead, he said. "According to the grand traditions, we declare that His Majesty's eldest son, Crown Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, will be the King of Nepal as of six o'clock in the evening 20 Jestha 2058." Since the new King was in the hospital and unable to carry out his duties, he continued, his uncle Prince Gyanendra was appointed regent. There was no further explanation.

An official thirteen-day mourning period was declared. Flags hung at half-mast, and the state machine, such as it was, shut down. Civil servants were ordered to refrain from eating salt for three days and to shave their heads. Thousands of ordinary citizens followed suit; barbers offered their services free. Kathmandu began to look like a city of off-duty monks. Shops closed, and the clubs and restaurants normally frequented by Kathmandu's wealthier young people were shuttered and empty. In the old quarter, the narrow, rutted streets were crowded with people shopping for food and the thin Nepalese newspapers that were sold from small piles on the damp pavement.

I was standing in one of these streets, looking at a high brick wall. Behind me an alley of small houses and rundown shops descended a slight slope, empty but for a dog that was giving close attention to its fleas. The undistinguished passageway had one extraordinary claim: a river of blood had once flowed here. The blood sealed the transfer of power from the Shahs to the Ranas, the two most powerful families in the country.

The Shahs had ruled Nepal since their warrior ancestor Prithwi Narayan Shah had conquered a scattering of rival princely states across the Himalayas and united them, in 1769. He was a legendary and merciless soldier, fierce enough to keep the British East India Company, which was already extending its power across India, from direct conquest of Nepal. He left his descendants a territory that would ultimately stretch from Mt. Everest, on the border with Tibet, to the malarial plains that rolled into India in the south, and which contained dozens of different ethnic and caste groups and more than a hundred languages and dialects.

The high brick wall I was looking

"You've made me very happy, Ted, but now I want to be miserable again."

at had belonged to the courtyard of the royal barracks—or the Kot—the place where the Shahs had lost their power. The place was still a barracks, as it had been on September 15, 1846, a date that, until June 1, 2001, had been reckoned the most notorious in Nepal's history.

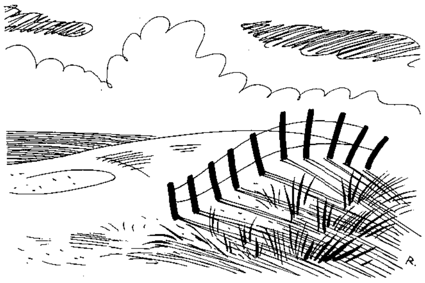
The kingdom had been in chaos for months as court factions fought for control and the junior queen was ascendant. That night, she summoned all the high officers to the Kot, determined to avenge the assassination of a favorite. The assassin, Jang Bahadur Kunwar, a ruthlessly ambitious son of a military family, arrived first, accompanied by six brothers and three regiments of soldiers, who waited outside. In the past, Jang Bahadur had not hesitated to kill for advancement, but that night the killing was on a scale that earned him a place in history. In the confusion of the acrimonious meeting, weapons were drawn and shots were fired; Jang Bahadur's soldiers forced their way into the barracks courtyard. Twenty-five nobles were cut down, along with an unknown number of soldiers and retainers. When the King, Rajendra Shah, arrived at the courtyard, he was so unmanned by the screams and the sight of blood running beneath the gate that he fled back to his palace. He died the next year.

The Shahs continued to occupy the throne, but Jang Bahadur Kunwar was now the country's supreme de-facto power. He purged the kingdom of his rivals and distributed the top jobs to members of his family. To consolidate his position, he drew up an apocryphal genealogy that conveniently demonstrated his descent from a royal house, the Ranas, a powerful family that had been Indian princes in the fourteenth century. He adopted the Rana name, and, with his newly raised caste status, his family became acceptable to Indian royalty. At first, the "Ranas" were barred from marrying members of the Nepalese royal family, but by 1854 the ban had been lifted. Henceforth, Jang Bahadur's descendants controlled the Shahs politically and were impossible to separate from them dynastically.

For more than a hundred years, the Ranas ruled Nepal as hereditary Prime Ministers, building up immense personal fortunes while eighty-five per cent of their subjects made a meagre living through subsistence farming. There was no distinction between state revenues and the Rana private purse. Giant palaces were built in a Western neoclassical style. The largest, the Singha Durbar, had more than a thousand rooms, organized around thirteen courtyards, plus a theatre, a huge galleried hall (which now serves as the parliament chamber), and a Versailles-inspired hall of mirrors. From its deep balcony, the Ranas acknowledged the crowds that had been summoned to gather in the wide avenue below.

But under the Ranas' rule the country stagnated. By the time their power was broken, in 1951, Nepal was among the poorest lands on earth. Two-thirds of the children died in infancy, and the average life expectancy was thirty-five years. Only two per cent of the adult population was literate. In the entire nation there were sixty miles of railway, only a few miles of paved roads, and no electricity outside the Kathmandu Valley. Nepal was isolated and unchanged, locked in a medieval past. And the Ranas, despite their splendor, could never escape the sordid associations of the founding act of their power: the Kot massacre. And now, in the official silence that followed June 1, 2001, it was easy to believe that another murderous struggle for power had occurred.

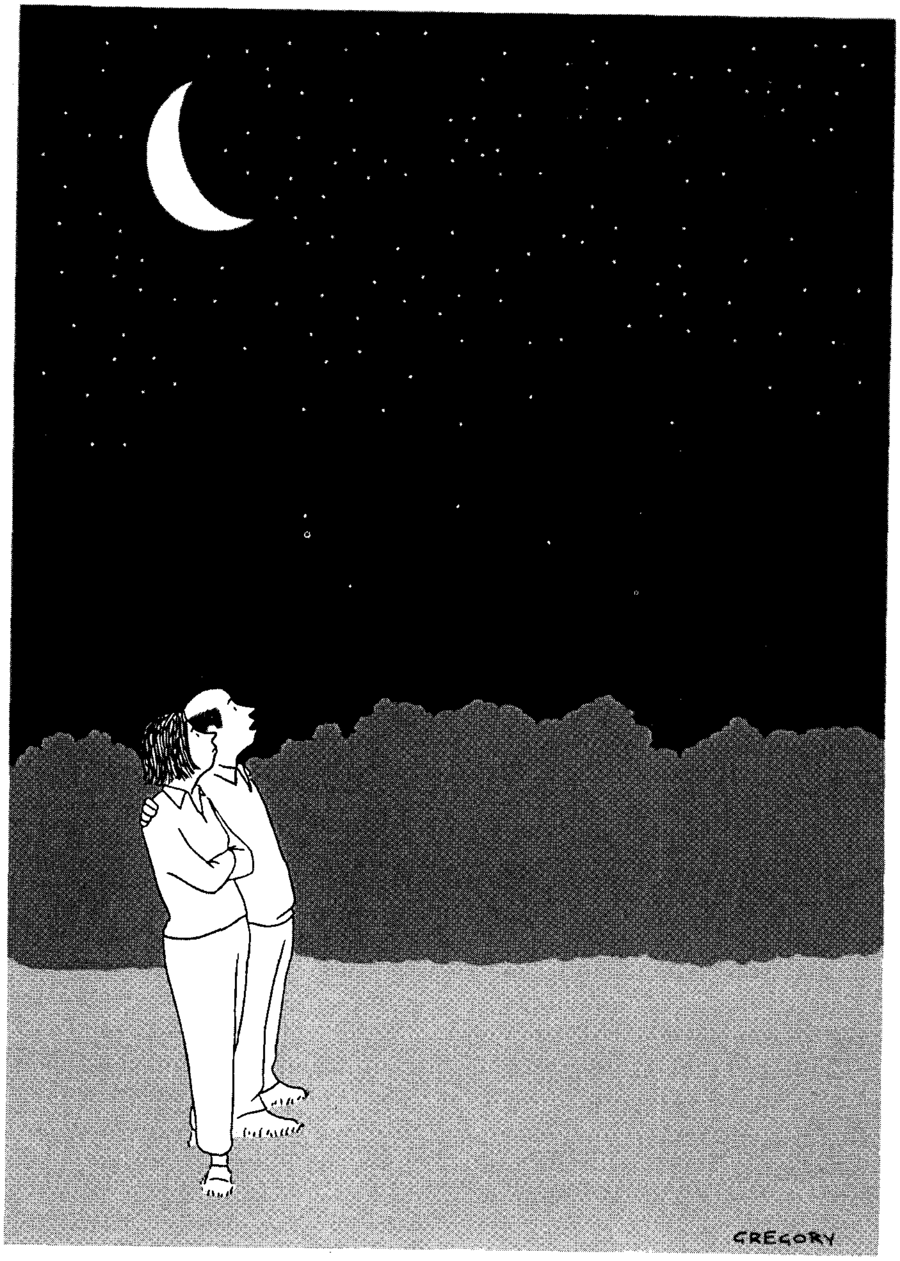
Old stories took on new life as people tried to comprehend the incomprehensible. King Birendra, it was pointed out, was the eleventh generation of kings. As everybody knew, a curse had been pronounced on the first Shah king of Nepal by one of his defeated enemies, who had promised to serve faithfully for eleven generations, and then reappear within the family and destroy it in an act of vengeance. A curse seemed no less credible than some of the other stories. King Birendra and his son Dipendra had both been popular; Gyanendra and his son Paras were not. The previous August, half a million people had petitioned the King to punish Paras after he killed a popular musician in a drunk-driving incident. Gyanendra's absence from the murder scene was interpreted as foreknowledge. Paras's presence was equally suspicious—he was one of the few unscathed—and it gave strength to the theory of a power struggle. That the popular and apparently dutiful Crown Prince Dipendra had shot his whole family because he wasn't allowed to marry the woman he loved seemed the least likely possibility of all.



On Saturday, June 2nd, twenty-one hours after the killings, a funeral procession set off from the military hospital to the Pashupatinath Temple, bearing the bodies of the eight dead—Dipendra's parents, his sister, his brother, his uncle, and three of his aunts. The procession was headed by a mounted guard of honor, followed by a police band playing sombre music, and then the King's body on an open bier, wrapped in saffron cloth. The Queen was next, in a covered palanquin, then the bodies of her son and daughter. Half a million people lined the route. As the cortège passed, they wept, threw flowers, and shouted, with affecting futility, "Long live King Birendra."

Beneath the temple, on the banks of the Bagmati River, the royal ghats, the platforms where the bodies would be cremated, were piled high with wood. It was nearly ten o'clock, and dark, when the fires were lit. As the smoke rose from King Birendra's funeral pyre, the first heavy drops of an approaching monsoon began to fall.

The next morning, Prince Gyanendra issued his own statement, trying to disguise the horror of Dipendra's last act. "According to a report of the incident received by us," he said, "an automatic weapon went off suddenly, seriously injuring His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, Her Majesty Queen Aishwarya Rajya Laxmi Devi Shah, His Royal Highness Crown Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, His Royal Highness Prince Nirajan Bir Bikram Shah, and other royal family members and relatives." As an explanation, it was worse than silence. Fearful of what might happen next, people formed lines outside the few functioning shops



"Look, a shooting star—let's critique it!"

• •

in order to stockpile kerosene and cooking gas.

By Sunday afternoon, Dipendra's condition had worsened. Devkota informed Gyanendra that the Prince had no chance of survival. What did he want to do? Gyanendra consulted the Queen Mother. Dipendra's life support, he told Devkota, was not to be switched off unless his heart stopped. It stopped at three-forty the following morning. Dipendra had been King for less than forty-eight hours.

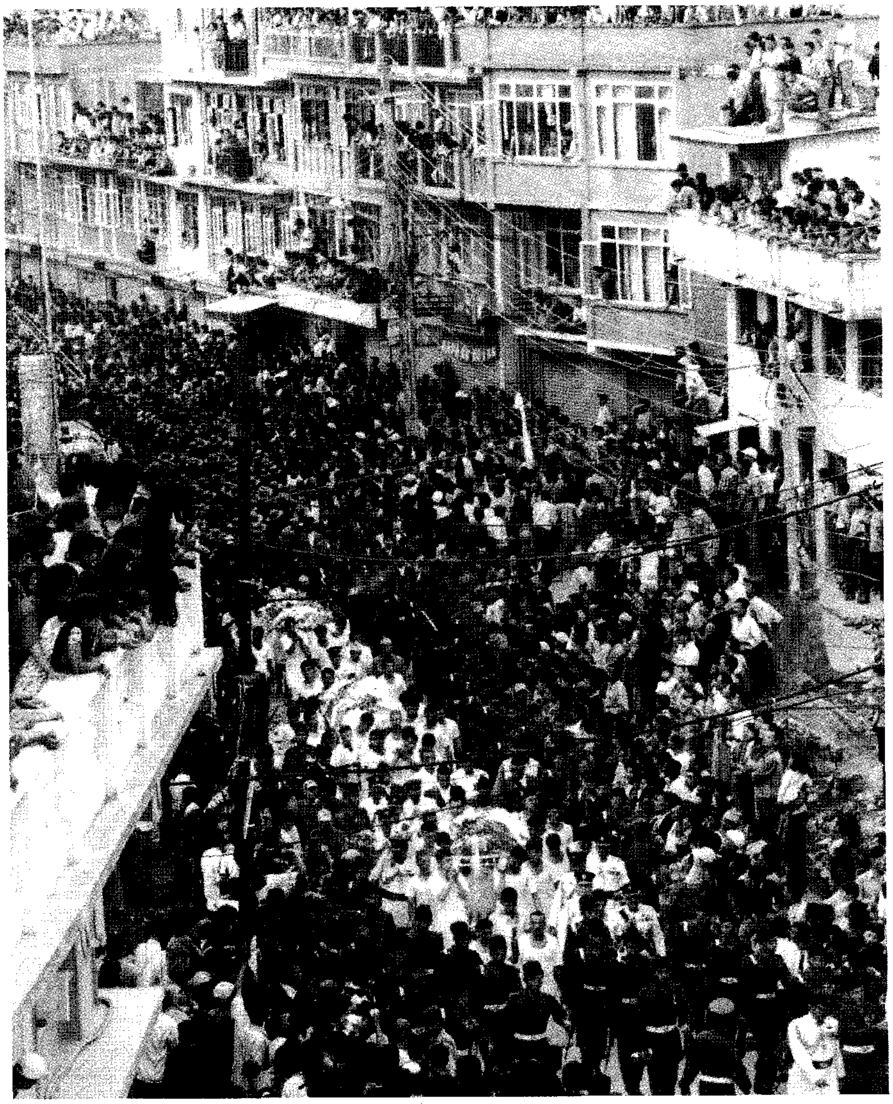
Gyanendra was now King of Nepal, the third king in four days. The enthronement ceremony was conducted in a misty rain within the walls of Hanuman Dhoka, the Shahs' first royal palace. Gyanendra looked profoundly depressed. There was still no credible official explanation of the events that had placed him on the throne. He rode back in an open chariot drawn by six white horses. As the procession passed, an unusually silent crowd watched. There was little clapping. In one spot, hecklers jeered, "Death to Gyanendra!" When the chariot disappeared into the palace, crowds gathered just outside the gates, shouting "Gyanendra the murderer!" and throwing stones at the palace walls. The police responded with tear gas.

The new King was known as a less sympathetic leader than his brother—a hard-nosed businessman—and his image wasn't helped by his son Paras, with his heavy-drinking swagger and his readiness to draw a gun. That evening, the new King addressed his subjects in a brief television broadcast. Now he promised the truth. He appointed a three-man commission—the Chief Justice, the Speaker of the House, and the leader of the Unified Marxist-Leninists, the main opposition party—to investigate the events at the palace and report their findings within three days. The leader of the opposition party resigned the next day. To add to the confusion, a Maoist rebel leader published an article in a local newspaper lamenting the death of King Birendra and accusing Gyanendra and sinister foreign forces of being behind the massacre. The newspaper's editor and two of its directors were arrested on suspicion of sedition. For those in search of an explanation, it was further evidence that the truth was being suppressed.

A curfew was announced: anyone in violation would receive one clear warning before he was shot. The streets had emptied by that afternoon, when Dipendra's body was driven on an Army truck to the same sacred site where his victims had been cremated, two days earlier. That night, two protesters were shot.

On the night of the killings, a hostile crowd had gathered outside the family home of Devyani Rana, the woman who had been linked to the Crown Prince. There are hardly any photographs of her. She had never courted publicity, and few people outside her social circle would have recognized the woman who might have become the Queen of Nepal. After June 1st, her name was known everywhere.

The heavy gates of her home remained shut. Devyani was said to have left for Moscow, where her family had business interests. She was also said to have fled to the family home in Delhi. (Her presence in India was indirectly confirmed when her brief statement for the inquiry was delivered to the Nepalese Ambassador in Delhi.) There



Clockwise from above: Devyani Rana was the granddaughter of a maharaja, but she and the Crown Prince had grown increasingly reckless; a half million people watched as the bodies of King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya, and Prince Nirajan were carried to the river to be cremated; King Gyanendra at his enthronement; his son, Prince Paras, who is considered a playboy; an astrologer unrolls King Birendra's chart.

were rumors that she was pregnant, that the couple had been married in a secret ceremony. A relative said she'd been ill.

I called the house in Delhi, one of several there that belonged to Devyani's Indian relatives. There was no answer. Later, I drove around Delhi, testing the resolve of the guards on several of the family's large properties (one consumed an entire city block). The guards insisted that nobody was there.

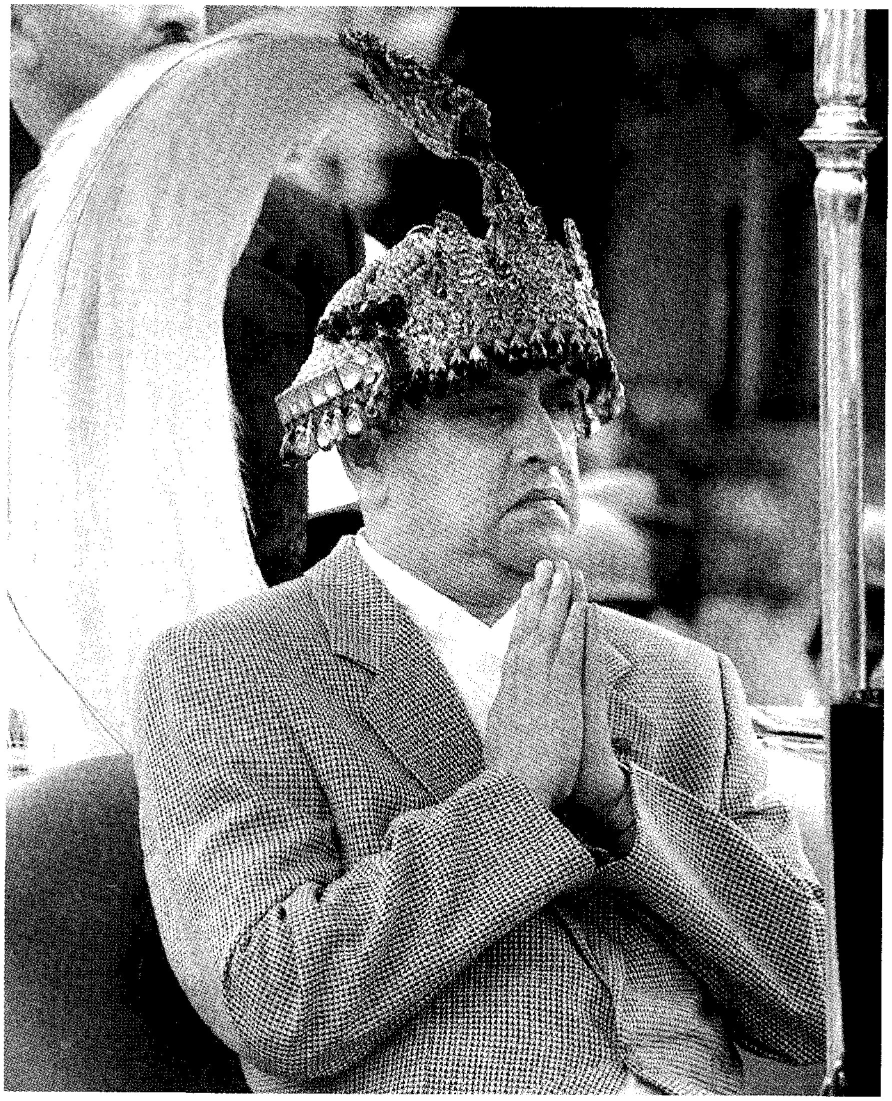
"I saw her father at the funeral," an elderly politician told me. "We were at the military hospital, and the bodies were in the open air. The place was full of flies. He was so downcast, almost fallen. He's a respectable gentleman, educated at Oxford. He knew me and how close to the palace I was, how intense the pain was. He gave me his arm. I felt he was barely containing himself. He must be overwhelmed, thinking about his daughter's future."

Few people outside Devyani's intimate circle had known the details of her relationship with the Crown Prince, although the fact that they were a couple—and that the royal family opposed it—had been the subject of gossip. But the mystery at the root of the Prince's desperate act, and the reason that the royal family had objected so stubbornly, was not explained. According to Prabakhar Rana, a business partner of the recently enthroned King Gyanendra, "Devyani is attractive, well educated, and well brought up. She does have a filthy temper, like all Rana girls, but I was very fond of her." As a Rana, Devyani was a member of the family that had married into the royal house assiduously for a hundred and fifty years. She was also the granddaughter, on her mother's side, of an Indian maharaja.

"Why did they not let them marry?" Prabakhar Rana said. "Her father is a politician—ambitious but not popular. Perhaps the late King felt he was a liability."

It was one theory; there were many others. There had been hints of a family feud—Devyani was said to be in some way the wrong sort of Rana. Rabi Shumshere Rana, uncle to both the late King Birendra and his Queen, a diminutive former general in his seventies (who, like many family elders, has a passion for lineage expressed in long recitations of the family tree), explained Devyani's ancestry—after several digressions involving collateral subbranches and a few asides on the progeny of junior wives. Devyani was descended from Dhir Shumsher, the brother of Jang Bahadur, the perpetrator of the Kot massacre. As it happened, the Queen was also descended from Dhir Shumsher, but from a different branch. "The Queen," Rabi said, "had in mind a different bride for her son,

LEFT: CORBIS SYGMA; RIGHT: FREDERIC REGLAIN/GAMMA



CLOCKWISE: STEPHEN LOCK/GAMMA; DIPESH TULADHAR/GETTY IMAGES; DERMOT TATLOW/LAIF

one who was from the same line." He shrugged. "I don't see the issue, but the late Queen was a very powerful character. If she made a decision, it couldn't be changed."

Rabi's generation had submitted without question to arranged marriages; for them, the issue was straightforward: it was the duty of a son or a daughter to obey. "I saw my wife only once," he said. "In the palace. The second time I saw her, we were betrothed. The third time was our wedding. In marriage," he added, "love comes afterwards."

Glancing reprovingly at my skirt, he said, "My granddaughter comes before me dressed like that." He smiled. "I cannot scold her. It is the way things are. Going to restaurants, travelling—that's the modern thing to do. But in my time we went to friends' houses or on picnics. After television came, people began to imitate Western hooligans."

Some thought it was a matter of caste. Under the Ranas, Nepal was a nation of rigid social hierarchies reinforced by a Hindu caste system that had penetrated every ethnic group. Strict Brahman families still avoid eating in restaurants for fear of being served food prepared by socially unclean hands.

"You don't see untouchables here in Kathmandu," Arzoo Rana Deuba, the wife of a former Prime Minister, told me. "But go out into the countryside. The other day in my husband's constituency, some Dalit women were served tea by a Brahman boy. They were terrified. They thought they would go to hell." There had also been suggestions that Devyani's maharaja grandfather was not quite of the first rank of royalty, even though her family is one of the richest in India: it was said to have possessed a swath of northern India the size of France before being unburdened of it by the British. In fact, Devyani's mother had observed that her daughter would have a hard time adjusting to life in a family of such modest means as the Shahs. Surely even the royal house of Nepal could hardly view marriage with the granddaughter of such a maharaja as a social step down.

"For the royal family," Arzoo Deuba said, "blood is the only basis of their position. They didn't want to jeopardize it."

The rules, I was told by Prema Singh, who herself had married into the royal family, are that the Queen of Nepal must be Hindu and of pure blood for five generations. "It means regular marriage," she said. "A senior wife. One of Devyani's ancestors on her mother's side was not quite a senior wife." It was whispered that Devyani was descended from a concubine. "The royal family minded about lineage," Singh added. "After all, what's the difference between them and commoners if they marry just anybody?"

Was that what it came down to—a late rush of dynastic panic, a defense against the modern world and its different ideas of legitimacy? Had the royal family destroyed itself by insisting on the irreducible meaning of royalty?

Devyani's life, too, was riven by conflicting demands of modernity and tradition. She was educated but not employed. On the one hand, she enjoyed the privileges of wealth—shopping trips to Delhi and London, servants to fetch anything she required; on the other, she was subject to the restrictions of Kathmandu's oppressive upper-class society: a life, for marriageable young women, of carefully screened events, extended-family obligations, visits to the gym, dress codes, and the strict rules that governed with whom, and how, she could socialize.

The relationship was said to have begun in the greater freedom of England, seven or eight years earlier, when Dipendra and Devyani met at the home of a mutual family connection. It had continued through contrived meetings abroad and more circumspect assignations in Kathmandu. Lately, though, Devyani and Dipendra's behavior had grown more reckless.

In a severe lapse of protocol, the couple had been seen increasingly around town. The proprietor of the Fire & Ice Italian restaurant, a few hundred yards from the royal palace, had shown me the couple's favorite table. They were such regular customers, she said, that she had been searching for a gift for the Prince's upcoming thirtieth birthday.

Prema Singh had witnessed the couple's public displays. At a party in May, she had mentioned to the Crown Prince that her daughter was engaged and in love. "I, too, am in love," Dipendra said. At the Golf Ball, he and Devyani had sat at separate tables and talked on their cell phones.

Devyani had clandestinely visited the Prince in his quarters at the palace. And they had contrived to meet secretly at the Sydney Olympic Games, a trip that suggested a degree of intimacy that in itself would have ruined Devyani's marriage prospects. To an onlooker like Maya Rana, Prabakhar's daughter, the couple was heading for trouble. "Dipendra was acting as though the King didn't exist," she said. "This is a feudal society. For a royal courtship, the family comes to your house to ask for your daughter, then guards are posted outside the house. You only meet under strict supervision. Devyani knows the rules."

The most scandalous episode occurred at a party this year at the Hyatt Hotel. The couple had stayed behind until very late, and had danced together. Then the Prince kissed Devyani in public—in the parking lot. It was Rabi Shumshere Rana, the diminutive general, who told me of this episode. The recollection of it still rendered him indignant. "In front of three hundred drivers," he said. "No Nepali Prince does something like that. The King doesn't even wave. He never acknowledges the presence of other people. It's impossible to imagine."

Despite Dipendra's apparent devotion to Devyani, he had other girlfriends. The situation, Maya said, had begun to weigh on Devyani, who was afraid that she was going to be the laughingstock of Kathmandu. She had stopped travelling. "She wanted to be with people who kept telling her that it would all work out," Maya said. "People were beginning to say that if it didn't happen she was finished."

The day of the massacre, Maya saw Devyani at the gym.

"It was about five o'clock. We had a few jokes. But she was uptight on the subject. I said 'What's happening?' and she snapped, 'Nothing's happening. What should be happening?' She still didn't know what the Crown Prince would do."

Dipendra was nearly thirty, Devyani two years older—another strike against her, according to Rana elders. Both were past the conventional age of marriage in their social circle. Local newspapers had begun to comment on the Crown Prince's not marrying. The situation had reached the point where the King and Queen had told the Prince that if he insisted on making Devyani his wife he would have to forfeit the crown. Nirajan, Dipendra's younger brother, was soon to be married—with his parents' approval—and it was known that he was being considered for the succession. "It wasn't that the family had told Dipendra he couldn't marry her," Prema Singh said. "They were not unreasonable people. It was just that he couldn't be King."

There had been a warning of the impending disaster, but it had not been understood: although the royal astrologer had predicted a catastrophe in June, it was assumed to be an earthquake. The royal family, like most Nepali families, took no decisions without first consulting an astrologer (although, when told that the astrologer had predicted that Paras would one day be King, the Queen Mother laughed). Even in the confusion that followed the massacre, the royal astrologer had been asked to choose the auspicious moment for Gyanendra's enthronement.

I made my way to Patan, just south of the Bagmati River, to see the royal astrologer. Patan had once been the seat of a line of Malla kings, who were conquered by the Shahs. Less than half a mile from the ancient Durbar Square, which is crowded with temples and shrines, I found the astrologer's house. I crossed a tiny yard and came to a low doorway. It was pitch black inside. In the corner was a steep wooden ladder, which led to a small, low-ceilinged room, where the royal astrologer sat cross-legged before a low table. A group of clients sat before him in respectful consultation as a young assistant carefully filled in details on an astrological chart.

The astrologer showed no surprise at my arrival. I wondered, frivolously, if he had known I was coming. He nodded and directed me to a cushioned bench and returned to his clients. After some minutes, he rose and joined me. He gave me his card: "Prof. Dr. M. R. Joshi Ph.D. (Urban study and planning), Royal Astrologer and Geo-Astro Consultant." He gazed at a small window in the corner and described for me his training—long years of Sanskrit and mathematics, of geography and astro-science, with travels to the observatories in Greenwich and Mexico, a degree from the university at Varanasi in India—which had prepared him for his duties at court. These included recording the exact moment of birth of members of the royal family, choosing a child's name according to the position of the heavens, and determining the precise time to celebrate the rites of passage, which were all observed with the solemnity due state occasions.

I asked if the Prince's astrological chart had given any hint of what was to come.

The astrologer shifted slightly, as though pained by the vulgarity of the question. The room fell silent as the clerk and the clients listened intently, eager for the celestial explanation of recent events.

"It was a good chart," the astrologer said. "Of course, not every planet is good for everyone. Jupiter, Saturn, and the sun are in Taurus, according to our Eastern astrology, and Taurus is not friendly. There's a tug-of-war with the sun. The radiation is irregular and creates disturbances." He paused. "This is a very difficult subject," he added, giving me a firm look. Then he continued, steering gracefully toward past successes. "We predicted World War II. And the exact date of Saddam Hussein's war."

Had he no inkling of what Dipendra was going to do?

He had heard about the massacre, the astrologer said, just like any other citizen: a friend phoned and told him. He was summoned to the palace for the death rituals. The astrologer admitted that he had been surprised. "But I drew no conclusions," he said.

Was there anything unusual about Dipendra, I persisted. Any clue at all?

The astrologer could not remember. The chart was usually burned with the body, and the ashes thrown into the river. He did remember the expensive and elaborate chart of the Prince's great-grandfather King Tribhuvan, the astrologer said, brightening. He'd seen it as a child. It had been edged with gold and was so large that it required four men to carry it. Then the astrologer was suddenly melancholy. There was little opportunity these days, it seemed, for calculation on such an epic scale. "If only there was time. . . . I love to calculate charts, but there is no time."

There was a living to be earned, however. The astrologer sighed and returned to the more modest requirements of his waiting clients.

As the Prince grew up, the traditions of highborn semi-divine males still informed his education. As a teen-ager, he was taken on a hunting expedition in the royal game park to kill his first tiger, though the days of abundant tigers were over. He had been a scout, under the supervision of his great-uncle Rabi Shumshere Rana, and a guru to the royal family took charge of his education in ritual and spiritual matters. The formalities of royalty, and its many rules, were constantly reinforced by his parents.

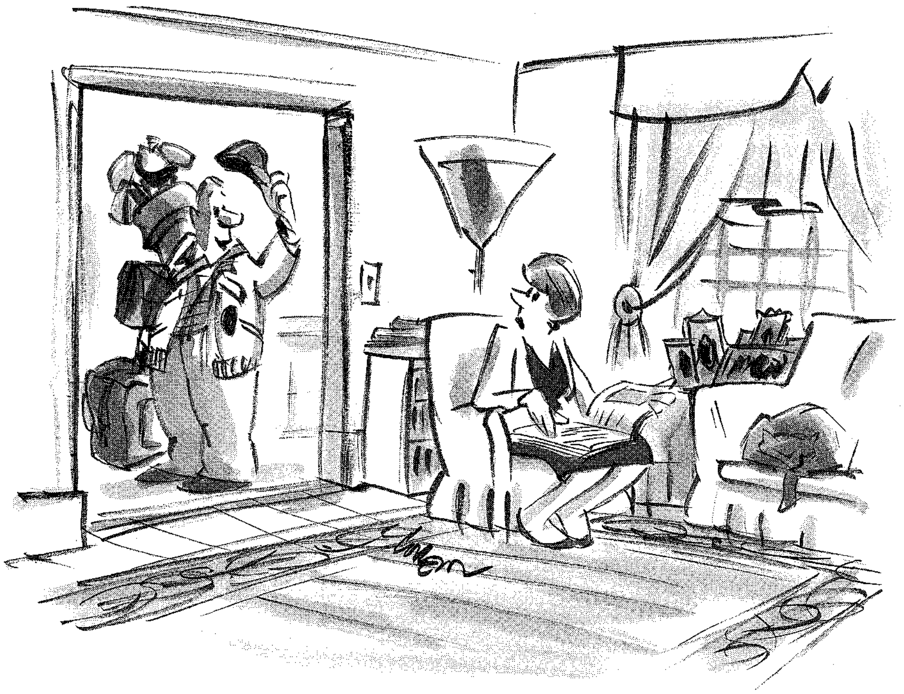
The senior members of the family had perfected an unblinking stare, disdaining to acknowledge the presence of lesser mortals. They were iconic and aloof. They were there to be displayed to their subjects, not to see them. (In the mid-eighties, after some consultation about the habits of Queen Elizabeth II, Queen Aishwarya persuaded her husband that she should occasionally be permitted to smile in public. Her first smile was the talk of Nepal.)

But the Prince's generation was starting to enjoy growing social freedom. His father had studied abroad and had negotiated his own truce with Western modernity. For his sons, the King chose an experimental school, in Budhanilkantha, a suburb of Kathmandu, that had been set up, with the help of the British government, to provide a modern education for bright Nepali children of any background. To avoid discrimination against lower-caste boys, the English headmaster had proposed a radical system in which each boy would be known not by his family name but by his first name and a number. No discussion of family status was allowed. In Nepalese terms, it was a social experiment of an advanced order.

Everybody knew, of course, who the Crown Prince was, and they also knew his cousin Paras, who attended the same school. The Crown Prince, the principal told me, was a coöperative and hardworking student. Paras, I later learned, was made to leave the school early, after returning drunk from a weekend at home and driving his car around the campus at high speed. With some embarrassment, the school was forced to suspend him.

I looked at the school yearbook for 1986, Dipendra's final year. There he is, frozen in grainy black-and-white, a slender, good-looking boy, grinning in the front row of the football team, dressed in a toga for the school production of "Julius Caesar," and, again, in the formal class portraits, as No. 832 Dipendra. The caption reads, "Enjoys football and golf, shooting and scouting. His first aim is to serve his country in the best way for the common good."

In an earlier generation, Dipendra



"Well, now that the kids have grown up and left I guess I'll be shoving along, too."

"How do you plead? Please listen carefully, as the menu has changed."

might then have been confined to the palace and the hunting park, his friends and acquaintances screened for suitability. Instead, on leaving school he went abroad. After a summer of coaching by his tutors—John Tyson, his English headmaster, found him intelligent but thought he was lonely in the palace ("I remember thinking that the only friend he had there was his dog," he said)—the Crown Prince continued his education at Eton.

He returned to Nepal and took up his post in the Army, where he flew helicopters and honed his shooting skills. He had always loved guns and was allowed to "test" new weapons and recommend purchases to the King. He kept an M-16, a twelve-bore shotgun, and a small pistol in a gun cabinet in his room.

At Tribhuvan University, in Kathmandu, he took a degree in geography and was working on a doctorate, but opinions of his intellectual abilities varied from "above average" to "mediocre." So did opinions of his character. In public, he appeared affable, approachable, and dutiful; he could work a crowd. When he met the Nepalese team at the South Asian Federation Games two years ago, he shook hands and mixed with the athletes, in an act of unprecedented informality. But some who met him socially saw him as a spoiled member of Kathmandu's jeunesse dorée—rich, arrogant, and willful, a young man who had been drinking since the age of fifteen, and who had no scruples about using his position to rescue his beloved cousin Paras from the police station after a violent incident; someone who had fitted a silencer to a gun so that he could blast away at cats and crows on the palace grounds without disturbing his parents.

I talked to Dipendra's friends and acquaintances, looking for anything that would shed light on his transformation from respectful son to mass murderer. Nothing I was told explained what he had done, beyond several accounts of a streak of insanity in the family and the hazards of inbreeding. One professor showed me a chart he'd drawn that purported to illustrate that the Crown Prince was the direct recipient of the genetic inheritance of several of the madder members of the family. I puzzled over how this squared with the same professor's description of Dipendra as an intelligent and rational man. But we were all guessing.

I had begun to feel that cognitive dissonance was a Nepalese national characteristic. Day after day, the newspapers were filled with black-ruled photographs of the royal family, displayed along with the condolences of local business firms, with no mention of the circumstances of the deaths. Tributes to Dipendra were published that omitted the fact that he had killed his family. "Hearty felicitations" on the accession of King Gyanendra appeared that made no reference to the gruesome prelude to his enthronement. There was a sense of waiting, but nobody seemed sure for what. Foreign residents talked of leaving. Parliament was closed, and of the government there was no public trace. As I travelled around the city, there was still talk of an attack—from India or the Maoists. The sense of helpless drift created apprehension of further catastrophe. Anything seemed possible except perhaps the story that Dipendra had shot his family in a rage over its refusal to let him marry the woman he loved. It was the one thing that, in the absence of plausible alternatives, I was increasingly convinced was true.

The monsoon rains had settled in, and a heavy, humid morning gave way to a sudden afternoon downpour, which sent people scattering for shelter as street traders hastily threw plastic sheets over their goods. Outside the high south gate of the royal palace, formal state portraits of the late King and Queen had been propped up against the railings, and incense perfumed the warm, moist air. The palace, a glum modern structure, reminded me of the Beijing railway station: a gray tower set on an uninspired red brick building.

Under the Ranas, the Shah kings had been virtual prisoners in their palaces, revered as the incarnation of the god Vishnu but serving only as a decorative stamp to legitimatize the rule of their rivals. Then Birendra's grandfather King Tribhuvan orchestrated the overthrow of the Rana prime minister, with the support of a democracy movement inspired by the end of the British Raj, in India, four years earlier. There were even elections in 1959, won by the Nepali Congress Party; the following year, Tribhuvan's son King Mahendra jailed the leaders and banned political parties.

But by then the outside world had

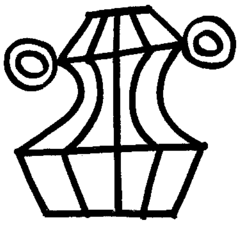
begun to arrive. At first, there were only a few diplomats and adventurers, but in the seventies the hippies hit town, drawn by the low cost of almost everything. Overland to Kathmandu became the pilgrimage route of the counterculture. They settled on a run-down street, rapidly nicknamed Freak Street, near the city's ancient temples, and cultivated a mind-altering ethic of drugs and mysticism. Thirty years later, the street is a jumble of cheap lodgings, drug dealers, and tourist shops. Most of the founding freaks are long departed, although a few of them have gone into the trekking business. But the door they pushed open admitted other foreigners—the tourists and the aid agencies, who challenged old habits by example and by design. The result is a bizarre reality, a dissonant collage of medieval traditions and the modern world. In the streets of the capital, the sixteenth century seems to exist in a chaotic patchwork with the twenty-first. My taxi-driver, fighting his way through the choking traffic of Kathmandu, carefully circumnavigated the somnolent cows who had parked their sacred rumps in the very center of a narrow street. At impromptu shrines to the dead royal family, people were praying and burning incense. Semi-naked holy men mingled with teen-agers in tight jeans who teetered in platform shoes along the lethally uneven pavement. I passed a jumble of crudely painted signs advertising Internet providers, computer courses, and classes in English on my way to houses occupied by people whose status derived from their place in a society that, for all its changes, is still essentially backward-looking and jealous of its privileges.

This almost modern Nepal had a dark side, illustrated by the story of Padam Thakurathi. Thakurathi is a former journalist and editor. Throughout the nineteen-eighties, his publications were regularly closed down, and he was frequently jailed for his activities, a misfortune that gave him an unanticipated scoop one day when a fellow-prisoner identified the King's brother Dhirendra (one of the casualties of the night of June 1st) as a key figure in Nepal's drug trade. Thakurathi went on to publish the story, without explicitly naming the royal family. "Those people," he told me, "were agents of the Mafia in Nepal. The royal baggage was never searched, so it was easy for them to take whatever they wanted out of the country—temple idols, antiques, heroin, and marijuana."

Thakurathi had been a disillusioned member of the Panchayat system, a cosmetic parliament that had been set up in the sixties by King Mahendra after he banned political parties. "It wasn't working," Thakurathi said. "And I realized that people had to stop blindly following the royal family. So I started publishing stories about what went on inside the palace." The stories provoked the royal family, and there were efforts to close down his newspapers; for instance, his compositors were all arrested, and he had to scour Kathmandu for replacements and pay them overtime to get the paper out. Then he received a phone call from an aide to the King's brother, offering him any sum of money if he would stop publishing. ("I was really encouraged! I knew I must be right.") When Thakurathi planned to print a story linking the palace to a scandal involving heroin smuggled through the Nepalese team at the Los Angeles Olympics, the decision was made to silence him for good. Late one night, his wife was awakened by a sudden noise. When she switched on the light, she saw blood gushing from her husband's head. A gunman had cut through the screen of their single-story house and shot him in his sleep. An ugly scar now runs across Thakurathi's shaved head, ending in a deep indentation over his sightless right eye.

Political leaders, too, were repeatedly exiled or jailed in their long battle for democracy. There were student strikes in the seventies, bomb attacks in the mid-eighties, and a steadily mounting toll of arrests. Finally, in 1990, rage against the monarchy broke out in mass protests in Kathmandu.

As revolutions go, it was brief and relatively bloodless. During it, the young Prince Dipendra faxed his father from Eton, urging him to accept the constitutional monarchy. After two months of protests, thousands of injuries, and some fifty deaths, the King gave in.



The era of absolute rule under contract with the gods was over. From now on, the Nepalese royal house would be subject to the doubt that undermines constitutional monarchy everywhere: what, in a democratic age, gives them their power, position, and privilege? For the Shahs, the final answer was blood—"pure blood," as defined by ever stricter and more archaic rules.

In the short term, though, political retreat saved the monarchy. The sins of the Shahs were forgotten as the quarrelsome politicians who now took over displayed a capacity for greed and corruption that exceeded anything the monarchy had ever done. There have been ten governments in the past ten years, and out of the splintering parties of the left an armed insurgency erupted in 1996, led by self-styled Maoist intellectuals who took Peru's Shining Path as their inspiration. By early this year, their influence extended over nearly a third of the country. The government was paralyzed for months as the opposition tried to force the resignation of Prime Minister Koirala, an unpopular man widely accused of corruption. (During the King's funeral procession, mourners hurled stones at the Prime Minister's black Mercedes, shattering the windows and denting both sides.) In the week before the massacre, strikes had left much of the country without transport, and fermenting piles of rubbish built up in the potholed streets of Kathmandu.

The unassuming King Birendra had come to seem like the only man who could command the affection of his frustrated and disillusioned people. "Even I," the businessman Prabakhar Rana said, "looked on the King as our last hope. I went to sleep saying, 'At least we have the King.' "

On the eleventh day of mourning, a *katto* ceremony is held, a practice that insures that a dead person's soul will find peace and not disturb the living. It requires an act of sacrifice by a Brahman, a holy man who takes on the burden of the dead man's soul by eating an unclean meal. He is then given money and an elephant and is driven from the

Kathmandu Valley. King Birendra's ceremony, on June 11th, had been marred by an unfortunate incident. As the elephant was on its way to the capital, a woman had run between its legs, honoring a local superstition that this would help her conceive a son. The startled beast picked her up with its trunk and threw her to the ground, killing her instantly. But if the portents for Birendra's *katto* ceremony were bad, the omens for Dipendra's, held two days later, were worse.

First, there was trouble finding a Brahman who was willing to lose caste for Dipendra. The man who was finally persuaded to take on the role, Devi Prasad Acharya, looked nervous and unhappy. He sat cross-legged, under an awning, surrounded by objects representing Dipendra's possessions. There was an implausible collection of furniture: a sofa and two armchairs, a few stools, a television set, and some bedding. A photograph of Dipendra gazed out from its silver frame, as though he were surprised to see his personal effects on display. Acharya seemed reluctant to touch the meal. Flies were buzzing around an uncooked goat's leg. There were piles of fruit and vegetables. Finally, he swallowed a few mouthfuls, then retired behind a screen to dress in his mock royal costume.

He mounted the waiting elephant, which set off down the path to the river, followed by a solemn procession of dignitaries and a less decorous swarm of cameramen.

Suddenly the elephant trumpeted and turned back up the path, sending politicians and press scrambling for safety. The mahout hung on to its ear and managed to swing the beast around, but, again, it turned to lumber dangerously back toward the temple. The third time, with a second mahout clinging to its tail and its decorative canopy slipping, so that it looked like a dowager who has had too much to drink, the recalcitrant beast was coaxed into the river's brown, fast-flowing current.

A few days later, I found Acharya. He lived with his wife and son in a dark brick building near the Pashupatinath Temple, where the royal family had been cremated. I sat outside on a low stool, and Acharya sat opposite me, his legs crossed, his breath coming in gasps. A group of curious children gathered round to stare. He wore a vest, and around his neck hung a gold chain that had once belonged to Dipendra.

The elephant had rebelled, he said, because he had been cheated. He had held out for a house, but they hadn't given him one. Now, he said, the landlord was asking him to leave, because, since the *katto* ceremony, he was unclean.

The landlord smiled apologetically. "It's true," he said. "My family is religious and we cannot keep him here now." Dipendra's restless spirit was causing unease, it seemed, even after death.

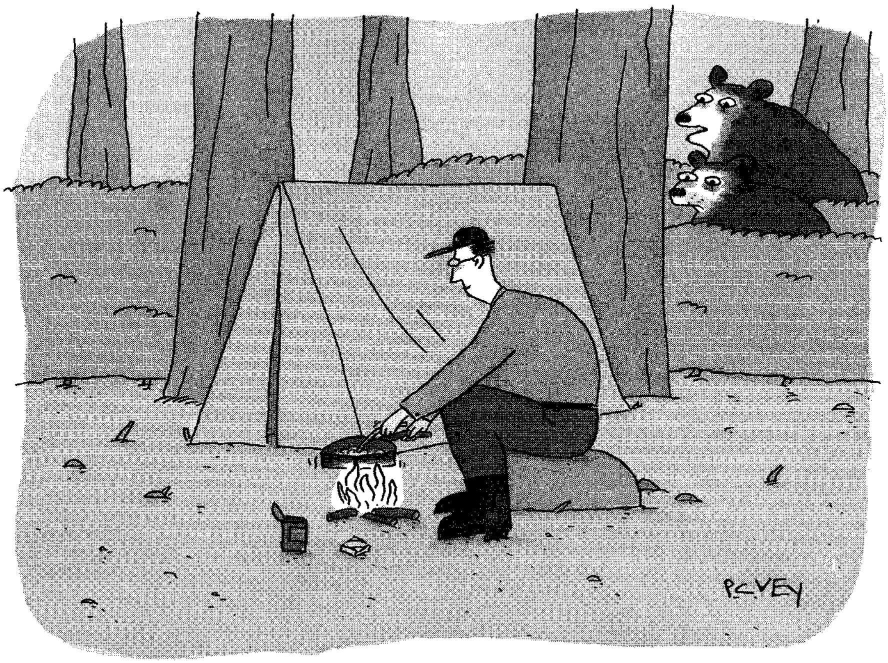
The day after Dipendra's *katto* ceremony, word spread that the official report on the massacre would be released that night, two weeks after the killings. In the parliamentary compound, I joined reporters and television crews who fought their way into a room that was clearly too small. A collection of weapons lay on a table in the center of the room. The report's two authors took their places, and the speaker of the parliament began to summarize their conclusions.

He read the statement in Nepali and in English, then stepped forward to show the evidence. He picked up the guns, one by one, as television crews elbowed each other aside for shots of him posing, smiling, with the guns that had killed the royal family. He picked up an M-16 assault rifle and pointed it playfully at the press. Beside me, a Nepalese journalist groaned and covered his eyes at this leap from tragedy to farce.

A camouflage jacket and trousers belonging to Dipendra were pulled out of a black plastic bag and displayed, like the skin of an animal that had been shot. He held up a pair of gloves and black leather boots. Over the din, journalists were shouting questions. The speaker declined to answer. "The report will be posted on the Internet," he said.

If the report was intended to convince the public of the official story, it was not an overwhelming success. Despite its length and the evidence, it did not attempt to answer the central question: what was it that had triggered Dipendra's murderous attack?

The Crown Prince's day had apparently been normal. He had spent the morning in his office and had lunched with his parents. That afternoon, he visited the Satdobato sports complex to check on the preparations for the upcoming national games, and then rejoined his parents to attend a formal tea party at the home of a guru. They returned to the palace—a family dinner was scheduled for later that evening—and the Prince went off to play a game of



"But his vulnerability is what I like about him."

billiards, his aide arranging the balls for him. The palace billiard room had a bar and a CD player, and the young set often met there. It was connected by a deep veranda to a sitting room where the Queen Mother liked to spend these evenings. Nearby was the dining room, where the buffet would be laid out. The evenings included only close family, and the aides waited discreetly in a side office; even the servants withdrew, leaving the guests to help themselves to drinks.

At 7:15 P.M., the Prince's aide ordered some wine and poured Dipendra a single shot of Famous Grouse. Then, leaving the Prince to his billiard game, he went to arrange parking for the guests, who would be arriving shortly.

The day before, an aide had telephoned Rabi Shumshere Rana, the King and Queen's uncle, to invite him, as usual, for seven-thirty. Rabi did not wear his watch to these functions, he told me, because the King was so forgetful about dinnertime. "Sometimes it could be eleven o'clock before we ate, even midnight. If I wore a watch, I would get nervous." He remembers, though, that he arrived promptly and that only one other guest was there, Maheshwar Kumar Singh, an uncle of the King by marriage. Rabi is one of the few people I met who has no doubt that the Crown Prince murdered his family. Rabi was standing a foot away from Dipendra when he shot the King.

Dipendra, dressed in the traditional informal costume of kurta and pajamas, offered Rabi a drink. Rabi chose a White Horse Scotch. Other guests arrived, and Dipendra continued to dispense drinks. Then, unnoticed by Rabi, Dipendra and his aide went off by car to fetch his grandmother from her residence, a short distance away.

When the Queen Mother was installed in her sitting room, Dipendra and the guests paid their respects; the protocol was that nobody should drink without first toasting her health. Rabi sat down with the old woman, while the younger members of the family gathered at the far end of the room to await the arrival of the King and Queen. The King arrived last, from his office, at eight-thirty.

According to Dipendra's phone records, he called Devyani on his cell phone at 8:12 P.M.—apparently from the billiard room. They spoke for one minute and nineteen seconds. At eight-nineteen, Dipendra called one of his aides and asked him to bring some "special" cigarettes, described in the report as a mixture of hashish and an unnamed black substance. Dipendra had been smoking such mixtures for at least a year, even at public events.

According to Rabi, most of the guests were in the Queen Mother's sitting room. The Prince had returned to the billiard room along with Paras and Nirajan, his younger brother. Although there had been no discussion of his marriage, Dipendra had told Paras that both his mother and grandmother opposed it, and he planned to discuss it with his father on Sunday. Then, bizarrely, according to some accounts, Dipendra appeared to fall down drunk and was carried to his room and left there to recover.

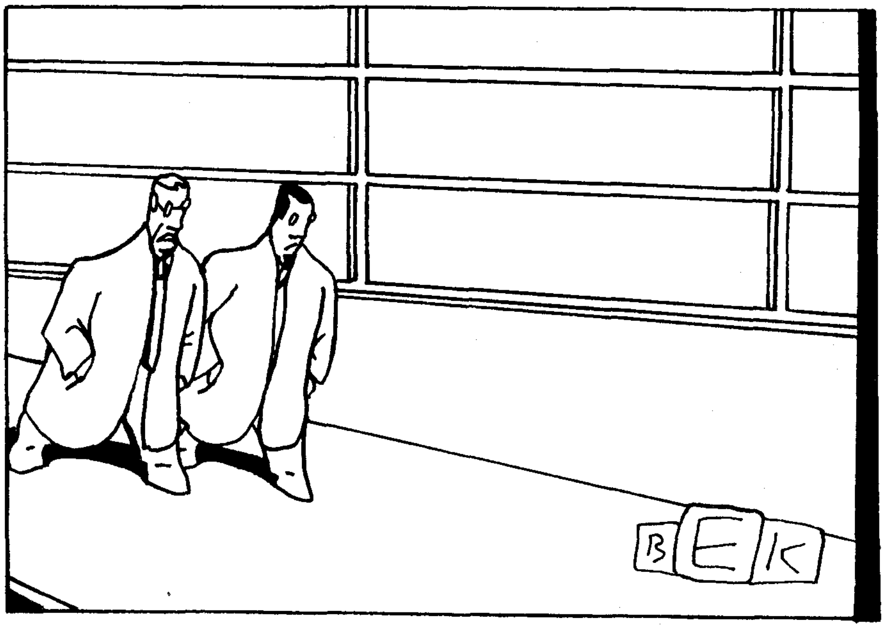
Dipendra sounded drunk when Devyani called back, a while later. This time, they spoke for more than four minutes. In her taped evidence to the committee, Devyani said that she was worried enough by his slurred speech to call one of his aides, Raj Kumar Karki. Karki was at home preparing for a trip to the United States and told Devyani that he was off duty. A few minutes later, Devyani called back to insist. Still reluctant, Karki telephoned the aide on duty, whom Devyani had also telephoned, and who assured him that two servants had already been sent to check on the Prince.

They found Dipendra on the floor, struggling to undo the buttons on his kurta. They helped him undress, and he lurched to the bathroom, where they heard him retching. Reappearing a few minutes later, he sent the servants away and called Devyani again to reassure her. "I'm going to sleep now," he said. "Good night. We'll talk tomorrow."

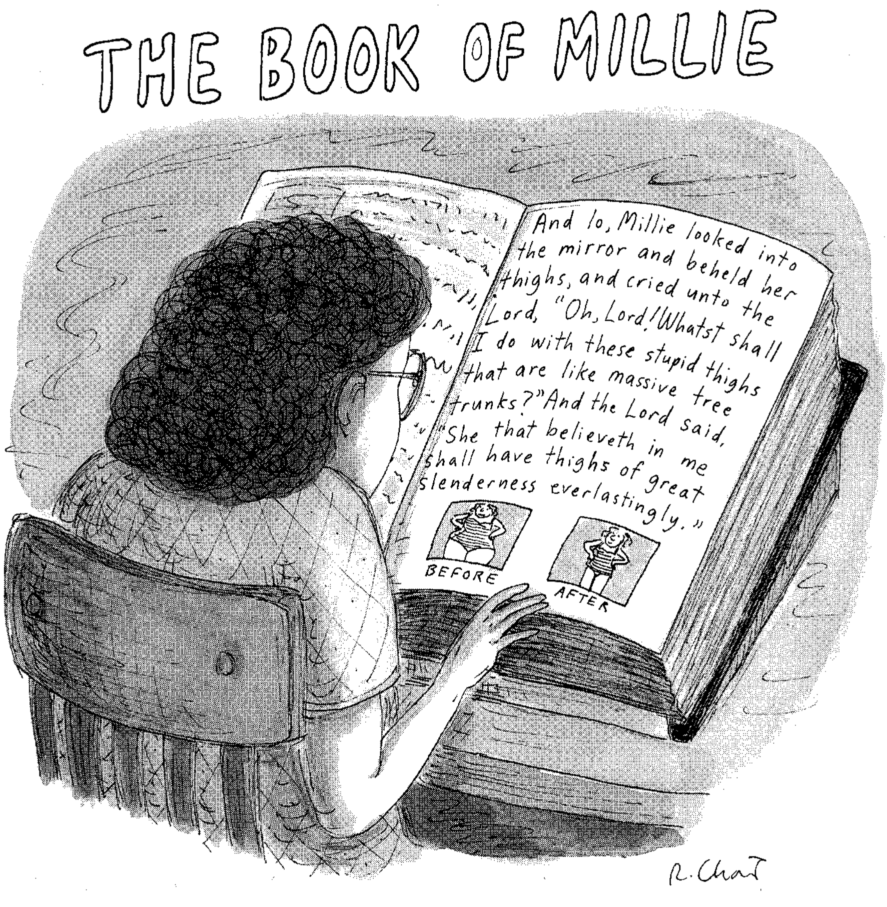
But Dipendra did not go back to sleep. He got up and dressed in a camouflage shirt and trousers, black boots, an Army vest, a heavy leather ammunition belt, a military cap, and black leather gloves. Armed with an M-16 assault rifle, a 9-mm. Glock pistol, an MP-5K automatic submachine gun, and a twelve-bore shotgun, he left his apartment. His aide, seeing him leave, asked if he needed an emergency bag.

"It's not necessary now," Dipendra replied.

Rabi was still chatting with the Queen Mother. By the time he went to refresh his drink, most of the company had drifted back to the billiard room. The King was standing near the billiard table with a Coke, in conversation with his uncle Maheshwar Singh, his brother



"I've been at home in a fired capacity."


THE BOOK OF MILLIE
And lo, Millie looked into the mirror and beheld her thighs, and cried unto the Lord, "Oh, Lord! What shall I do with these stupid thighs that are like massive tree trunks?" And the Lord said, "She that believeth in me shall have thighs of great slenderness everlastingly."
BEFORE
AFTER
R. Chast

Dhirendra, and a brother-in-law. A group of women, including the Queen, were seated on a group of sofas near the billiard table.

"What's happening?" the King asked Rabi.

"No news," he replied.

Maheshwar Singh apologized for his wife's absence—she had an attack of gout. The King sympathized. Gout, he said, and high cholesterol ran in the family.

It was then that Rabi noticed a man in full-camouflage fatigues, wearing black boots and a cap. "He had come up behind me as I was looking at the King," he said. "It took me a minute to realize it was the Crown Prince. He was carrying a gun, one I hadn't seen before. It was no more than a foot long. It could have been a toy." Rabi said that he had raised his eyebrows in a gesture of inquiry. "I thought it was a joke," he explained. "He always liked to dress up and play jokes as a boy. He was a lighthearted man."

Dipendra smiled at Rabi and, with no change of expression, fired three shots into his father. Then he left the room.

Rabi could scarcely take in what he had seen. "The King had been shot in front of me. I was stunned. He didn't jerk or flinch. He just leaned over very slowly and began to sink. He was wearing a pale-yellow silk kurta, and a patch of blood began to seep through it. He looked surprised, and said to his son, 'What have you done?' I still half thought it was a joke."

Rabi shouted for a doctor. As it happened, there was one in the room, a young Army doctor, related by marriage to the royal family. He rushed over and the King sank into his arms. Maheshwar Singh held the King's head.

The Queen went outside to call for help. Rabi left the billiard room and ran across the veranda to take care of the Queen Mother. Mastering his panic, he entered the room. The Queen Mother had not heard the shots, and Rabi closed the heavy door behind him, trying to think of a pretext for locking it. But the key was not in the lock.

In the billiard room, the guests were still trying to register what had happened when Dipendra returned, his cap now pulled low over his eyes. From the doorway, he shot Gyanendra's wife, Komal. Then he shot his brother-in-law Kumar Gorakh. As the Prince advanced into the room, the King's brother Dhirendra tried to intercept him. "Baba," he remonstrated, "you have done enough." Wordlessly, the Prince shot him twice at point-blank range. The Prince then dropped the submachine gun and left the room. For a moment, there was silence—then pandemonium.

At the far end of the room, Paras had kept his head. He pushed the young women down behind a sofa, then shouted to Maheshwar Singh to get out of the line of fire. Maheshwar sprinted toward Paras and threw himself onto the floor beside the young princesses. The King's daughter, Shruti, dashed in the opposite direction, toward her father, but as she reached him she found her husband, Gorakh, lying wounded nearby. The Army doctor and the King's sister Shoba were still trying to stop the bleeding from the King's neck.

The King struggled to get up. He picked up the discarded gun, but his sister snatched it from him and threw it on the floor. Then Dipendra reappeared at the door, this time holding the M-16. Terrified, the doctor dashed for the safety of the sofa. The Prince approached the King and shot him again, at point-blank range, in the head. Then he shot and killed another uncle, the helpless Kumar Khadga, then his aunt Sharada. The light on the M-16 flashed on and off as he fired. He shot his sister, and as she fell on top of her wounded husband Dipendra shot his aunts Jayanti and Ketaki.

He turned toward the group that was cowering at the far end of the room. Paras took a step toward him and shouted desperately, "What are you doing? What are you doing? Please go!" The Prince looked at him and hesitated. He did not open fire. He turned and left the billiard room, heading toward his own quarters.

The Queen Mother, meanwhile, unaware of the slaughter next door, had grown so irritated by Rabi's odd behavior that he felt obliged, at last, to tell her that the King had been shot. He told her to wait while he returned to the billiard room to see what was happening.

The King's aide-de-camp, on duty in a nearby office, as usual on these family occasions, had heard the gunfire, followed by the Queen's shout for a doctor. He called for the guard and was moving, with military caution, toward the billiard room when he heard the second burst of shots. The room's glass door was locked, and he saw the royal family lying on the floor. The guards broke the door in, carried the King to a palace car, and raced to the hospital. By the time Rabi appeared, palace troops were frantically carrying the other casualties to cars.

There was no sign of the Queen or her younger son, Nirajan. The last living witness to their fate was a kitchen boy who noticed them as they passed by. Prince Dipendra also went by, moving backward, a gun in each hand. The Queen was in pursuit, shouting at him. Then, from the dark garden, there was another burst of fire. Nirajan's body was found near the path to Dipendra's apartment. Dipendra discarded the M-16 and headed for his rooms, still followed, evidently, by the Queen. He climbed a few steps toward his bedroom, then turned and fired, killing his mother. He came back down the stairs, stepped over her body, returned to the path, and crossed a bridge. He was found by an aide, who had followed the sounds of his groans. He was lying by the bridge, shot through the head. His 9-mm. pistol had fallen from his hand into a pond.

There had been no further riots, despite a fear that the report would provoke them. Outside Kathmandu, though, there was another concern. On June 15th, the final day of state mourning, the Maoists attacked a police post in Nagar, in the west. Then, in a grim celebration on the eve of King Gyanendra's fifty-fourth birthday, in early July, they killed forty-one policemen.

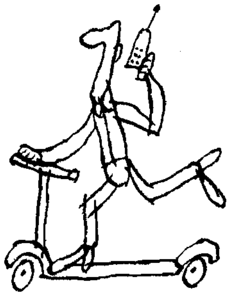
I flew down to the Tarai, the flatlands near the Indian border. It wasn't under direct Maoist control, but the insurgents had a presence here, collecting "taxes" from businesses and aid agencies and occasionally showing their hand. I drove through paddy fields broken up by traces of a luxuriant jungle that had once covered the area. Now there was just a scattering of villages: crude mud-walled houses, thatched with rice straw. Barefoot children were filling plastic buckets at a pump. In a suffocating low brick schoolroom with a corrugated-metal roof, a woman was trying to teach an overcrowded class. She was not regularly employed, she explained. There were three salaried teachers, but they rarely appeared.

I asked the class if they knew what had happened to the King. They fidgeted on a crowded bench. A boy stood up. "Paras," he said. "It was the son of the King's brother who killed him."

An aid worker told me that, in rural villages like this, only one in five women could read, and very few managed to complete secondary school and earn the School Leaving Certificate that could free a child from the absolute poverty of the village, with its malaria and kalaazar fever and its perpetual edge of hunger. Among the unemployed, he said, the Maoists found willing recruits. "They ask them what they have got out of democracy."

Workers for an international aid agency in a neighboring district told me they pay a regular "tax" to the Maoists. When the charity was first approached and responded too slowly, a pair of masked men appeared and set fire to two vehicles. A nearby plywood factory was burned to the ground after the management declined to pay. Now the aid workers pay the taxes promptly, and the Maoists scrupulously issue receipts stamped with the heads of Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

The next day, I waited at an appointed meeting place for the Maoists. Two hours went by before they filed into the building: four small, thin dark men, who greeted me not with raised fists but with hands pressed together in the traditional Nepali greeting. They gave their names and their positions, one of them standing at attention as he spoke, like a child reciting the alphabet. Another wrote my questions down carefully in a small notebook.



"This is a people's war," said one who had introduced himself as Mohan Shishid. "The system now is a government for only ten per cent of the people, even though it is elected."

How long would the war take?

"Seven years, fifty years," Mohan said. I glanced at the others. Their eyes were fixed on the table where we sat. I asked them if the palace massacre had changed their strategy.

It had. Before the massacre, they had called for an interim government and for an all-party convention to draft a new constitution. I had heard of this plan, which had met with a lukewarm response from the elected government. But now there was a new situation.

"We don't believe Dipendra killed them," Mohan insisted. "It was Gyanendra and Paras, supported by external powers—the C.I.A. in Delhi, working with the Indian secret service."

Why? I asked.

Because the Communist struggle was emerging in Southeast Asia and Birendra had been reluctant to deploy the army to stop it.

Our meeting broke off with the news that a police motorbike had been seen in the area. My visitors slipped out, one by one, and went their separate ways along the dirt road. The Maoists had vanished as quietly as they had appeared.

A short time later, in the Rolpa district, the Maoists captured seventy-one police officers. On July 19th, King Gyanendra ordered the Army in, a move his brother had always resisted.

The new King is rarely seen in public. The servants who had supplied Dipendra with drugs were dismissed, but the palace has done little to clear up the remaining mysteries. No one tested the Crown Prince's blood to determine what he had ingested on the night of the massacre. A month afterward, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), the main opposition party, voiced a question shared by many of his countrymen: How, he asked, should the Nepali people view Dipendra, the fratricide, regicide, matricide, and suicide who had, nevertheless, briefly been their King? "Should he be honored," he asked, "or treated as a criminal?" It was a question to which neither the government nor the palace replied. ♦

PROFILES

DEBT AND THE SALESMAN

Bill Bartmann understands a lot about people's hard luck—and for a while that made him a billionaire.

BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH

Bill Bartmann once claimed he had made so much money that if it were all piled up and a match were put to it he'd die of old age before the fire went out. He was just forty-eight years old when *Inc.* magazine reported this fireproof boast, early in September of 1997. A portrait of Bartmann on *Inc.'s* cover showed him in closeup, with his right hand raised to hide much of his face, leaving only his left eye exposed—an inscrutable, peekaboo pose—alongside the legend "The Billionaire Nobody Knows." The magazine speculated that he could be worth as much as three and a half billion dollars, and expressed its awe with a giddy three-word paragraph: "Gates . . . Buffett . . . Bartmann?" Later that month, when Bartmann turned up on *Forbes's* annual ranking of the richest Americans, tied for three-hundred-and-fifty-fourth place with his wife and business partner, Kathy, the couple's combined fortune was reckoned, more conservatively, at $1.1 billion. Regardless of Bartmann's true worth, what made his appearance on the *Forbes* roster astonishing wasn't the quantity of his money but, rather, its source, which was identified simply as "debt collection." This was a first in the list's fifteen-year history for a business associated less in the popular imagination with tycoondom than with harassing phone callers, back-alley kneecappers, and night-riding repo men.

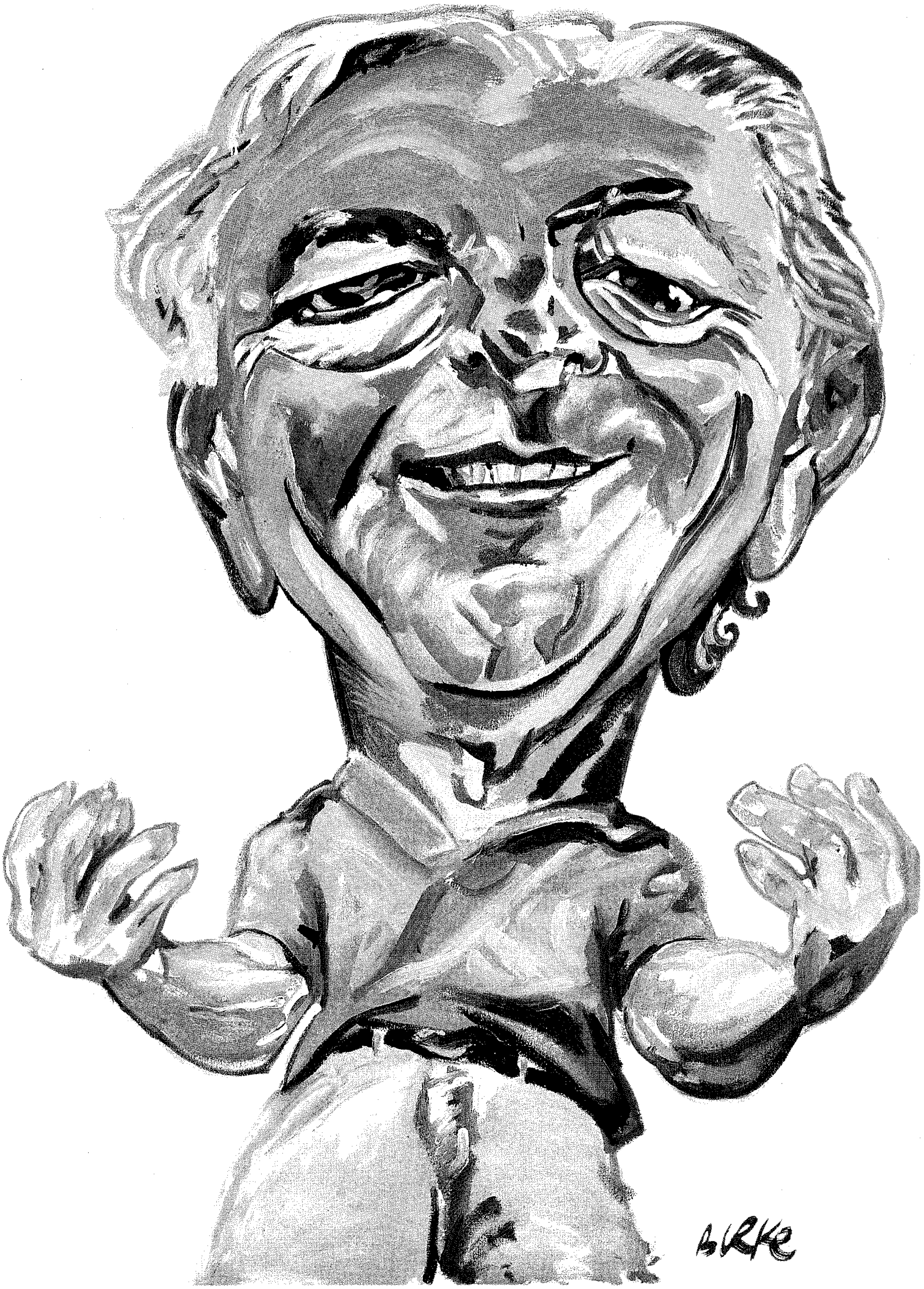
But there it was: America's stunning economic growth in the previous decade was largely buoyed by a mounting flood of consumer credit, much of which was never paid back, and Bartmann, who had been worse than broke himself a decade earlier—a million dollars in the hole—had clambered straight out of the abyss into the highest altitudes of wealth by buying other people's bad debts from creditors at radical discounts and making those debts yield. Bartmann's company, Commercial Financial Services, had its headquarters in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He had opened the office there with seventeen employees, in 1990, and eight years later he had an army of nearly four thousand working for him on fifty-one floors of three gold-tinted glass towers, leased from Oral Roberts University. For three consecutive years, in the mid-nineties, C.F.S. boasted revenue increases of four hundred per cent, and by 1998 it was reporting a net annual take of about a billion dollars and a scale of profits higher than Microsoft's.

C.F.S. was the sixth-fastest-growing private business in the country, and Bartmann came to enjoy the aura of one of those mystical moneymen who periodically appear out of the American ether and, by seizing control of previously unrecognized financial levers, transform the way we understand the gears and cogs of our economic life. To account for what he freely called the "magic" of C.F.S., he tended to point to the company's "culture," which consisted of a ferociously cultivated esprit de corps within an over-all ethic of aggressive niceness. Employees were called "family," debtors were called "customers"—as if they had chosen to do business with C.F.S., rather than the other way around—and even the act of collecting was described with ennobling euphemisms: not as the squeezing of deadbeats but as a service for the financially overextended. Bartmann's hypothesis was that debtors would respond better to sympathetic pressure than to bullying and insults, and he pointed to his bottom line as proof.

C.F.S. collectors were hard-driven to meet ambitious monthly quotas, and at the same time to adhere to the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, a consumer-protection code whose strictures virtually everyone else in the business prefers to ignore. It was Bartmann's policy never to sue a recalcitrant debtor, or even to threaten suit, and it was a no-second-chance firing offense for collectors, who worked by telephone, to speak an impolite, angry, or otherwise intimidating word to a debtor, regardless of the abuse that might be coming at them through their headsets. Bartmann himself was known to show his temper when his workers displeased him. But he rewarded them generously, paying them, on average, fifty per cent above standard market wages and providing them with outstanding benefits, bonuses, free day care and annual college-tuition grants for their children, and travel junkets—a Caribbean cruise, a weekend at Disney World or in Las Vegas—where Bartmann led the C.F.S. family in ecstatic chants: "We are not average! We are not normal! We are different! We are C.F.S.!"

Bartmann, who spent at least half his time travelling on business in a private Gulfstream-IV jet and went nowhere without a security detail of former Secret Service officers and off-duty Tulsa cops, delighted in his status as a guru. His Web site, www.billbartmann.com, includes a photo gallery of plaques and trophies that he has been awarded for his supremacy as an entrepreneur, as well as the full text of his keynote address to the first annual Entrepreneurship Conference, at the Wharton School of Business, in 1998, where he declared humankind to be divided between "failure avoiders," who go through life "mostly just marking time," and "success seekers," who "live a life of excitement and terror," and "are almost certain to experience failure—perhaps several times." Bartmann went on to argue that mistakes are more instructive than successes, and he said, "At C.F.S., we call this principle 'Nothing Bad Ever Happens' . . . we don't allow ourselves to be discouraged by a setback, because just around the corner is an even better result if we can only apply the lesson."

PHILIP BURKE



Bonds in Bartmann's company had been floated on trust—trust in him. "I knew I had created my own monster," he said.

Still, Bartmann wasn't sure that success-seeking could be learned, much less taught; it was, he suggested, a matter of temperament, so he used his time on the Wharton podium to speak about himself. "My first principle is: steal the ideas of others," he said, and he went on to name some masters of enterprise whom he particularly admired: Henry Ford; Fred Smith, of Federal Express; Herb Kelleher, of Southwest Airlines; Sam Walton, of Wal-Mart; Wayne Huizenga, of Blockbuster; Ross Perot; and Alexander the Great. "Alexander conquered the known world with a small band of fiercely loyal and dedicated followers," Bartmann said, and he explained that the Greek ruler's example taught the importance of having "a mission that is clear and simple and that is easily embraced by the workforce." Then he summed up his roll call of heroes, saying, "If you put all these guys together, who do you get? I like to think that you would get me."

Bartmann received a standing ovation at Wharton, but, as it turned out, he was wrong about nothing bad ever happening. Eight months later, in October of 1998, an anonymous letter alleging that C.F.S.'s books were cooked, and that the company's financing was little more than a Ponzi scheme, created a panic among Bartmann's investors. Within days, he withdrew from active operations, and the company's balance sheet promptly pitched into the red. Layoffs followed; half the workforce was dismissed in January of 1999, and the remainder in June, when C.F.S. folded for good and went into receivership. When I visited Bartmann in Tulsa this spring, he claimed that, except for the money he has wrapped up in his house—a fourteen-thousand-square-foot extravaganza on twenty acres—he was down to his last million or two, and that was largely earmarked for the lawyers he was paying to steer his way through scores of civil lawsuits that have settled like cluster flies on the company's carcass.

Bartmann, however, presented himself as a man on the rebound. In May of last year, he had opened a new business in Tulsa, called Neighborhood Financial Center, which specializes in providing a hard-up clientele with a variety of financial services—pawnbroking, small-loan issuing, and check cashing—that are collectively referred to as "fringe banking." Bartmann himself describes the common run of such businesses in terms similar to those he once used for other debt collectors—"ugly, nasty, dirty, rotten, despicable"—and, once again, he says, his aim is not so much to compete with the traditional market as to conquer it with modest discounts and an atmosphere of relentless civility. Of course, he also aims to make pots of money, and, with national consumer debt at an all-time high of $1.6 trillion and personal savings at a corresponding low (less than zero), there is every reason to believe that he has, once again, raked a bright prospect out of the economic muck. Fringe banking—with its gouging practices and usurious, triple-digit annual interest rates—is one of the fastest-growing sectors of America's financial-services industry.

"How do I keep picking myself up, dusting myself off, and going forward again?" Bartmann said. "I think I can. Now, how I can—I don't know the how. I don't know how I'm going to get to the level that I once had, or some level close to it, or even the financial independence that I once enjoyed, but I know I can. In my mind, I can." After all, he told me, "I don't need to prove anything to anybody objectively, but yet, subjectively, I feel this compulsion. It's a never-ending circle. So why do it? Obviously, it's psychological."

As a young man, Bartmann took up flying and very nearly killed himself attempting to pilot a small plane, without a radio and in freezing rain, from Iowa to Oklahoma. He returned to earth somewhere in Missouri, and concluded that, "personality-wise," when it came to aircraft he belonged in a passenger seat. "Entrepreneurs have to believe they can do anything that's in front of them," he told me, and for the past quarter century he has been amassing fortunes, and abruptly losing them, at a dizzying clip. Yet his propensity for revisiting a state of ruin hardly seems to detract from his sense of accomplishment, and this may have something to do with the fact that he began life in poverty in Dubuque, Iowa, as the sixth of eight children, in a family—his father was a janitor, his mother a housecleaner—whose annual income left them dependent on government food aid.

Bartmann cannot recall reading anything but a comic book until he was nearly twenty, and in many ways he has experienced his life as a fantasy in which he figures as an action hero, moving from frame to frame with an ever-quickening sense that he is endowed with extraordinary powers. His habit of identifying with figures on the scale of Alexander the Great—other favorites include Christopher Columbus and Don Quixote—is without irony. In October of 1997, at the peak of his wealth, he flew three thousand C.F.S. employees, each with a spouse or a date, to Las Vegas, and appeared before them at the Thomas & Mack arena, surrounded by dancing girls and dressed as Julius Caesar (glittering breastplate, crimson tunic, sandals, and a gilded laurel crown); then, with the professional wrestler Hulk Hogan at his side, Bartmann stepped through the ropes to stage a mock combat with his chief collections officer, Charley Welsh, who was got up as Fred Flintstone and was accompanied by Brutus Beefcake. Pumping his arms over his head, Bartmann proclaimed, "This is magic!" and basked in the whooping cheers of his debt-collecting legions, until fireworks erupted from the floor and spilled down from the catwalk, and he disappeared.

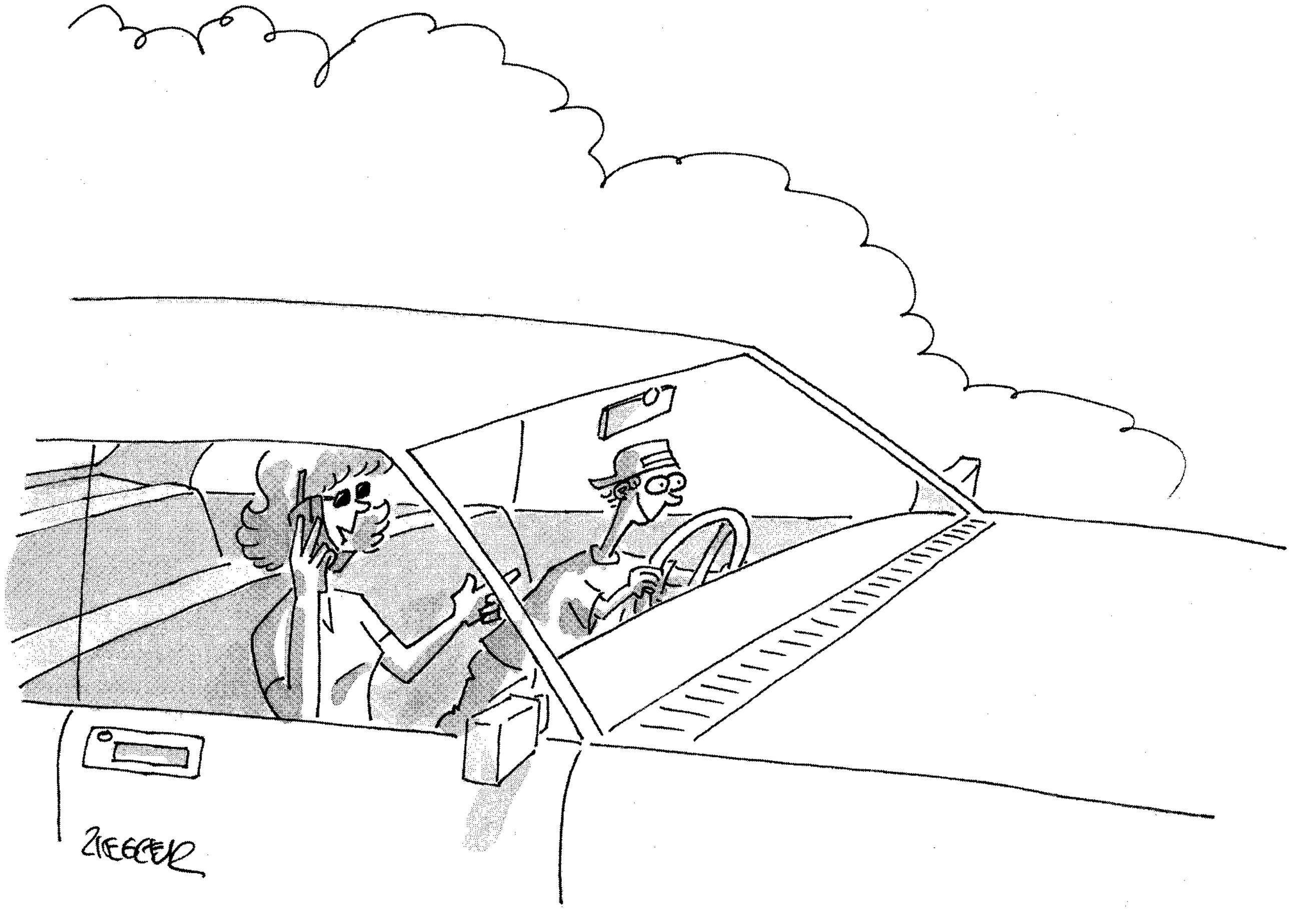
Bartmann is a small, muscular fifty-two-year-old with an energetic bearing. From the neck down, he looks boyish; his shoulders are narrow, his waist slender. But his head, like a leprechaun's, is slightly oversized for his body, creating an unexpected impression of mass and stature that is emphasized by the way he wears his thick gray hair, swept back and long enough to curl over the nape of his shirt collars. His default, fixed expression, the look that settles over him when he is between bouts of animation, is a sort of rumpled smile, neither warm nor cold but enjoying an off-duty moment. In this state, he looks content, perhaps bemused, a trifle bored and a trifle eager, like a salesman in an empty showroom awaiting the apparition of a customer. He wears hearing aids in both ears, drinks a great deal of coffee, and although he had a heart attack a few years ago, and was recovering from pneumonia when we met, he smoked steadily through our conversations, which lasted for as long as six hours at a sitting.

The smoke has been kind to his voice, which has a folksy hint of a country drawl. His sentences are clear-cut, his thoughts wrap into tidy paragraphs, and his tone with me was one of such assured ease that even his curses sounded polite. It was only later, when I read the transcripts, that I saw how often what had sounded restrained or contemplative carried a punching edge of wit or anger, or both. Bartmann had told his story many times before; it was full of set pieces. Yet, as he worked through it again, he gave the impression of a man just discovering his own peculiar blend of coherence and mystery, and the discovery seemed to please him.

Bartmann was periodically suspended from school for rowdiness—"fighting, cherry bombs in toilets"—and, he said, "Ultimately, I spent five and a half years in high school without graduating." By then, he was on his own. He'd left home at fourteen, and eventually joined a gang that specialized in drinking, brawling, and vandalism. During the summers, he hung around Freddy's Beach, a small resort near Delhi, Iowa, where he developed a crush on a girl from Dubuque named Kathy Rolling. "I was the boy she wasn't supposed to date, for all the good and obvious reasons," Bartmann said. "Her dad's got an M.B.A. from Harvard, and they were smart and status and all. They're the top-of-the-hill kind of people, and we were always at the very low bottom of the hill."

Six months after he was thrown out of Dubuque Senior High School, Bartmann was loitering outside a pool hall, when the dean who'd expelled him, a man named Donald Henderson, came strolling up and asked him what he aimed to make of his life. Bartmann, who was working part-time night shifts at a meat-packing plant (he blames its heavy machinery for his loss of hearing), said that what he really wanted was a job with the Flexsteel furniture company, "because I could work days, I could keep my night job, I would have a job and a half, I could make all this money." Henderson looked as if he had never heard anything more stupid. Bartmann said, "Well, Don, what the hell would you do?" and Henderson told him, "I'd go to college." Bartmann protested that he wasn't smart enough, but apparently Henderson recognized in him an unexpressed capacity, because he said, "You can, too, and I can show you how, if you want to go do the work."

Bartmann couldn't remember anyone with any academic standing showing him such respect. For the next six months, he studied under Henderson's tutelage for the high-school-equivalency exam, and when he passed Henderson informed him that Loras College, where Bartmann's father was a janitor, offered the children of its employees free tuition. "Nobody ever told us that," Bartmann said. "Dad didn't know. I didn't know. No Bartmann had ever gone to college in the history of the family tree." Henderson negotiated



"I can assure you this call is perfectly legal. Timmy's driving."

"Will he know what this is in reference to?"

his admission, and although Bartmann had to struggle to maintain a C average, when he graduated Henderson encouraged him to become a lawyer. Fifteen months later, when he began law school at Drake University, in Des Moines, he was finally able to marry Kathy.

On the day he got his law degree, in 1975, Bartmann told his assembled family, "I'm going to quit in five years." He didn't know where the words came from and he quickly forgot them, as he dug into a solo practice that he likened to the "black-bag, horseback days" of country doctoring. As a self-avowed workaholic with a taste for fourteen- and fifteen-hour days, he soon found that he was making "some pretty fair money." He invested what he could with his older brother, Ted, a high-school dropout who was getting rich trading real estate in Oklahoma. As their portfolio grew, Ted eventually became tired of managing it alone, and said, "Little brother, it's your turn." With that, Bartmann, who happened to be marking the fifth anniversary of his law practice, shut up shop, and he and Kathy, who by that time had two young daughters, moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma. To this day, he remains mystified by the five-year limit that he gave himself as a lawyer. He presented it to me as an amusing curiosity in the cabinet of wonders that constitutes what he called "the enigma of Bill Bartmann," and the implication was clear: he was a man uncannily attuned to his own sense of destiny—not a prophet, but far-seeing, and quite unbounded by conventional horizons.

He and his brother swiftly cornered a near-monopoly on rental properties in Muskogee, then sold off their holdings toward the top of the market. On paper, at least, Bartmann was, for the first time, a millionaire. This was now the early eighties, the height of the Oklahoma oil bonanza, and although Bartmann says he couldn't spell "geology" at the time, he bought some cowboy boots and a "big old hat," leased some mineral rights, hired some drillers, and, with Ted once more as his partner, declared himself an oilman.

"A year later, we were absolutely flat-ass broke," he said. "Every dollar we had accumulated in the course of our lives went to crap, because we had pulled in friends, relatives, neighbors, people like that as investors." By the time they'd paid off their debts—"not a very smart, good, economical thing to do"—the only issue Bartmann and his brother could agree on was that it would be best to avoid each other's company for a while. "It was my first personal failure, and it was the hardest one to deal with," he told me, adding that he was reduced to a condition that he now recognizes as depression: "You just stay home, you don't open the mail, you don't leave the house, you just kind of want to sleep all the time, because what you're doing is just denying existence." Friends stopped calling, and before long the family was down to a few last tins of food in the larder. Bartmann's wife was on the brink of taking the girls back to her family in Iowa when a pre-approved credit card with a ten-thousand-dollar limit arrived in the mail.

The card sustained the family for a year, during which time the same Muskogee bankers who had backed Bartmann's earlier ventures invited him to take over an oil-pipe business that was going bankrupt. Bartmann called his new company Hawkeye, and during the next three and a half years he and an associate, Jay Jones, built it up, until it had seventy-one employees and he was again a millionaire, this time in cash. "Felt good," he said. "Didn't last long. Shit happens." By August of 1985, the price of oil had fallen from nearly forty dollars a barrel to thirteen dollars, the demand for Bartmann's pipe dropped to zero, and two months later he liquidated Hawkeye and found himself owing the bank a cool million.

Bartmann refused the relief of bankruptcy—he says he found thoughts of suicide more tempting—but although he wanted to honor his debts, every collector he heard from treated him like scum: "People were calling the house and talking to my daughters and saying bad and nasty, aggressive, surly, nasty crap, and it just irritated the shit out of me. I didn't think that was smart. I thought, I'm not going to pay you. You pissed me off. I'm going to pay everybody, but you're going to be last, you know, because I'll get even with you, because you just really jerked my chain. And as I thought about that, I reversed that: Hey, what if he had been nice? Honestly, it's really a revelation."

And, Bartmann said, "Fortuitously, that thought and an event came together."

The "event" was a classified ad in the Tulsa *World*, which ran, as he recalls it, under the heading "Bad Loans for Sale." The ad had been placed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which was foreclosing Oklahoma banks at a tremendous rate in the wake of the oil bust. Overwhelmed by the burden of liquidating each newly failed bank's portfolio, the F.D.I.C. had taken to auctioning off defaulted paper assets for ready cash. Bartmann couldn't imagine why anyone would buy bad debt, but when he saw the notice a third time, he told me, "It was just like progressive intelligence happening. You know, depending on how much they want for them, they're worth something. Now that you've established that—the something—if I can buy them for less than the something I could make some money on this thing. There's some money here. God, I wonder what they're asking for them, I wonder what they're worth. You know, I wonder where those two lines really are drawn."

The F.D.I.C. debt package consisted of two hundred and thirty-eight consumer loans from the National Bank of Commerce in Tulsa, with a total face value of five hundred and ninety thousand dollars. Bartmann decided there was no risk in taking a look at the file. "Never having been a banker or a lender, I didn't know squat, but I was reading people," he told me, and what he saw were men and women who reminded him of himself, who had borrowed in order to build businesses, buy homes, or take vacations, and had got slammed as Oklahoma's economy "cratered."

To a more cautious reader, the bad-loan files might have read as so many financial obituaries, but to Bartmann they were fat with opportunity. "I was already looking out and saying, 'You know, this is a rolling recession, and as this thing rolls away it's less bad in the back than it was up front.' " He guessed that if he bought the F.D.I.C.'s bad loans for two cents on the dollar, and offered debtors a chance to settle for whatever they could afford, he might see an immediate return of as much as ten cents on the dollar. Of course, that meant coming up with thirteen thousand dollars, which he didn't have, so he went back to the same bankers in Muskogee to whom he owed a million dollars, and asked for one more loan. "Trust me," he said.

Commercial Financial Services was incorporated early in 1986. Bartmann and his wife each owned forty per cent, and the rest belonged to Jay Jones, who had stuck with him after the Hawkeye collapse. They set up office in the Bartmanns' kitchen. Kathy kept the books, Jones was the computer man, building databases of their "customers," and Bartmann worked the phones, testing his theory that if you treat deadbeat debtors "like human beings" their wallets will fall open before you. Within a few months, they had collected sixty-three thousand dollars on that first F.D.I.C. loan package—a return of nearly five hundred per cent. "We called it the speech," he said of the technique they used, "and the whole canned speech was 'Hi, I'm Bill Bartmann, and I'm from C.F.S., and we just bought your debt'—you tell them the facts and you say, 'What can we do?' "

He tried the speech out on me, and our exchange went like this:

P.G.: Not much I know of that you can do. I haven't got a red cent to my name.

B.B.: Cool. That's the only answer that can't work for us, because if you keep telling me you can't do nothing, I'm going to have to go do something. You don't want that to happen, and I don't want that to happen.

P.G.: They all say that, and none of them do it.

B.B.: Yes, but I own the debt, remember.

P.G.: Yes, but the last guy that dunned me owned the debt, too.

B.B.: Yes, but they were a bank and they collected ninety-seven cents on the dollar. They have a three-per-cent loss ratio.

P.G.: I don't need to know that. I just need to know you don't want ninety-seven cents on the dollar. What do you need?

B.B.: I need you to tell me your facts and circumstances, Philip. What can we do? You owe me ten thousand dollars. You tell me what you can do, and tell me why I should take that offer, and I'll consider it. Make me an offer. Tell me what's going on in your life.... I know a lot about you. I know that you no longer work at a magazine. What are you doing now?

P.G.: I can't find anything to do.

B.B.: So how long have you been unemployed? Do you have a car?

Bartmann wouldn't let up. I asked if he would accept monthly payments, but he would do that only for the full amount of the loan, which discouraged me, so we started haggling over a lump-sum settlement of two thousand dollars. That would give him a profit of nine hundred per cent and would save me from eighty per cent of my indemnity, but he said, "I really can't take two. I'm not done with you yet." With that, he unleashed a monologue, telling me that he understood what it meant that I was jobless, and my kid was sick, and my car was broken down. He was so convincing

"Is this the focus group?"

that I began to feel pretty sorry for myself, and at the same time heartened to hear my plight recognized, at which point he said that he could cut me a deal, and accept fifty dollars a month for six months, which was "a negative amortization" for him and wouldn't allow me to gain any real ground on my debt, either, but it would give me time to put my life together again. On he went, tossing figures around and saying how, as my situation improved, he'd raise my monthly payments a little, and I was beginning to hear a bright future in his voice, when we'd be working together, sorting out this problem we had in common, until I suddenly heard him reminding me, "I can do that, but you'd owe me the whole ten thousand." At that point, I was about ready to pay whatever it took to make him shut up.

So I was right where Bartmann wanted me. "Once you hang out there at home, thinking about it, once you start doing your own math, almost invariably you'll come back and say, 'I could probably do twenty-five hundred,'" he explained. He held a hand to his cheek—pinkie to his mouth, thumb by his ear—to suggest a phone, and, as he pretended to listen to me offer twenty-five hundred dollars on a debt he'd bought for two hundred, he pumped his fisted free hand in victory, and pantomimed cheering, but his voice betrayed no such delight. "Damn it, Philip," he told me, quite gravely, "that's a tough thing. O.K."

"Fun business," Bartmann said a while later. Of course, there were some debtors who just wouldn't pay, and others who just couldn't, so each deal had to be balanced against the over-all performance of the portfolio it came from. But, with the success of C.F.S.'s first batch of bad debt, the F.D.I.C. offered it a bigger package, which the bank in Muskogee was now happy to underwrite. Continuing in this way, it took Bartmann two and a half years to pay off his own million-dollar debt, and when he did he started feeling "a bit more aggressive." That meant buying up debt faster than he, and a growing staff, could collect it, "package after package after package," as he followed the F.D.I.C. along a trail of failed banks across the Midwest and into the South.

Then the savings-and-loan crisis struck, and, in August of 1989, President Bush signed legislation that created an emergency arm of the F.D.I.C. called the Resolution Trust Corporation, which was charged with selling off the assets of some four hundred insolvent thrifts during the next three years. Bartmann's response was "There is a God in Heaven, and he gave us the R.T.C.," and he told me, "It was then that I said, 'Shit. This is not a business, this is an industry. . . . If I'm right, and I'm not smoking bad dope, if I'm looking out clearly, wow, this is going to be big.'"

The bad debt that the Resolution Trust Corporation had to sell was different from what C.F.S. had handled before, and collecting it required a staff with an economic expertise that Muskogee couldn't provide. In 1990, Bartmann moved the company to Tulsa to "staff up," and cast his net over what he lovingly described as "this big rat being foraged through this giant snake called the R.T.C." And, three prosperous years later, when the R.T.C. began to dry up, Bartmann, impatient to keep growing, saw that his bad-debt god had visited a plague of plastic on the land.

Throughout the preceding decade, banks had been issuing credit cards in a largely indiscriminate fashion, and by 1994 the average American cardholder was carrying nearly four thousand dollars of debt forward from month to month at an annual interest rate of seventeen per cent. This was what the banks wanted, of course; in the credit-card industry, it's customers who pay their accounts in full each month who are referred to as deadbeats, because they don't allow card issuers to make much money. Then again, a lot of people who amass credit-card debt simply stop paying, and when an account remains inactive for six months the banks call it a "charge-off" and subtract it from their active-balance sheets. Until Bartmann came along, the standard practice for banks was to shift charged-off accounts to in-house collections departments, or to farm them out to independent contractors. Bartmann's idea was to persuade the card issuers to get out of the collection business altogether, and to sell their charge-offs wholesale to C.F.S. for cash.

In order to make his case, however, Bartmann had to be in a position to convince the card companies that he could relieve them of all their bad debt every month, and in order to do that he had to "find a way to raise enough stinking damn money to buy all that stuff every month, knowing none of it's going to be collected yet before the next month comes along and I have to buy another big chunk." The problem, in other words, was how to sell futures in bad debt. Bartmann's solution was to issue bonds against C.F.S.'s future collections. Nobody had ever done that with nonperforming, unsecured debt, and it took him two years to put all the pieces in place. "We were creating a business that did not exist, which made it a tough sell to anybody," he said with characteristic grandiosity. But Standard & Poor's, the bond-rating agency, was impressed with C.F.S.'s computer models, and after conducting its own investigation of the company's records and operations it gave C.F.S. an astonishingly confident A rating for its first bond issue—an eighty-million-dollar deal, which was concluded in May of 1995.

With that, C.F.S. tore into credit-card debt, buying tens of millions of dollars of charge-offs a month in exclusive deals with such leading card issuers as Chase, M.B.N.A., Providian, and Wells Fargo. The wild acceleration in volume required the hiring of new staff at an equally frantic clip, and the company was soon expanding in every direction as revenues leaped skyward. It was impossible to collect the debt as fast as C.F.S. bought it, but new bond issues kept bringing in new cash at a rate of half a billion dollars a year. Two years after its first foray into credit-card debt, the company was taking over more than half the charged-off accounts generated in the country each month; its inventory of uncollected debt had a face value of more than seven billion dollars; and Bartmann, eager to expand his burgeoning monopoly, opened a European headquarters, in England.

The trade papers loved him. "Respectability at Last for Buyers and Sellers of Bad Debt," a headline declared in the *Credit Risk Management Report*, in March of 1998. The article advised, "Now is the time to consider going into the bad debt marketplace. The

SHOWCASE BY MARC ROYCE *Roller skaters join hands for a dance near the Bandshell in Central Park.*

market has boomed in recent years, but is only going to get bigger, say analysts. Much bigger.” And, the *Report* went on, “Thank Bill Bartmann for taking it mainstream.” That summer, he announced that he was buying a savings and loan in Arkansas so that C.F.S. could itself begin issuing credit cards to its customers who had settled their earlier debts, and around the same time Goldman, Sachs began preparing the company to go public with an I.P.O. that was expected to bring in greater cash flows than ever.

“My life was good,” Bartmann told me. “We were changing the entire collection industry in America.” Of course, it bothered him when competitors scoffed that C.F.S.’s numbers were just too good to be true, but he dismissed such sniping as the disgruntlement of less imaginative souls. “True genius,” he told reporters, “is discovering the obvious.”

TO WAITING

You spend so much of your time
expecting to become
someone else
always someone
who will be different
someone to whom a moment
whatever moment it may be
at last has come
and who has been
met and transformed
into no longer being you
and so has forgotten you

meanwhile in your life
you hardly notice
the world around you
lights changing
sirens dying along the buildings
your eyes intent
on a sight you do not see yet
not yet there
as long as you
are only yourself

with whom as you
recall you were
never happy
to be left alone for long

—*W. S. Merwin*

The anonymous letter that ended the magic at C.F.S. was just a page long. It arrived in the offices of the company’s bond raters in early October of 1998. Its author’s identity has never been disclosed, but there is little doubt that the writer was a former high-level employee. The letter insinuated that the company was not collecting on its debt portfolios at anywhere near the rates it boasted; that its top officers had for the past thirteen months been covering up this fact by selling off large chunks of uncollected-debt inventory to a company called Dimat, in Shawnee, Oklahoma, then recording the income from those sales—a total of sixty-three million dollars—as collections; and that Dimat was actually a shell company set up by Bartmann’s partner, Jay Jones.

Bartmann’s first response when he heard these charges was to issue what he called a “can’t be so” statement. A few days later, however, he released a second statement, indicating that Jones was, in fact, involved in Dimat. Yet Bartmann continues to insist that nothing else in the anonymous letter was true; that the company’s books were clean, its finances were strong, there had been nothing to cover up—and that he was as dumbstruck as anyone by the discovery of Jones’s double-dealings. Jones’s role in C.F.S. operations had steadily diminished in recent years, and for the previous ten months he had been selling his stake to Bartmann in monthly installments of about five million dollars. This appears to have been the money with which Dimat then paid C.F.S. Bartmann acknowledges that the circular transaction might look suspicious. But, he asks, why would he have spent fifty million on C.F.S. stock if he knew the company was heading toward catastrophe? He had believed in his company and he had believed in his partner, he told me, and he had wept after confronting Jones about Dimat. “I love Jay,” he said. “It’s a love-hate thing. I know the man. He does not have a malicious bone in his body. He did what he did, and it was stupid, terminally stupid, but it wasn’t an evil thing.”

Agents from the F.B.I., the I.R.S., the S.E.C, and a host of other federal, state, and private investigators, have been combing through the C.F.S. records for several years, and so far no criminal charges have been brought against any of the company’s managers. That could change, however; Clark Brewster, an attorney for Jay Jones, told me that Jones would not speak with me, because he had learned that he is a target of a United States Attorney’s Office investigation. Bartmann, however, appeared less concerned with questions of illegality than with an abiding sense of injury—a sense that the faith on which he had built his name and his fortune had been betrayed. “The lesson out of C.F.S. is I shouldn’t trust somebody, and that’s a lesson I refuse to learn,” he said. “I don’t think there’s anything I can learn other than become a real tight, puckered-up, scared, nervous, distrusting person who wants to check everybody’s wastebasket every night.”

As for his own liability in the litigious aftermath of C.F.S.'s undoing, Bartmann told me he lives with the knowledge that he could, at any moment, be served with a subpoena, or an indictment. He said it hurts him "more than I ever let the real world know" to think that there are people who are so eager to see him punished that they "wouldn't spit on me if I were on fire." But, at the same time, he said, "They've got to prove in court that I did something I did not do. That cannot be done. That is physically, metaphysically impossible." In the end, he said, "I should have seen something that now, in clearer hindsight, is more obvious than it was to me in the facts and circumstances of the environment. But that's what I'm guilty of, if anything. I didn't see it, and I say that nobody did."

Following the crisis of the anonymous letter, Bartmann stepped down from C.F.S. and invited a full investigation of the company's affairs. Even if he could not be saved from ruin, he had imagined that the company might be salvaged. But his resignation had the opposite effect, because C.F.S. had floated on trust—trust in Bartmann. In fact, all of its outstanding bond-issue papers had included an extraordinary clause stating that his departure from active involvement in running the company constituted grounds for default. Bartmann claimed that the idea of securing the bonds in himself had come from the investment bankers, and he said, "You know, half of you is flattered. It's ego-tripping—'Wow, they really must think I'm cool.' The other half is—'What a pain in the butt.' So I was ambivalent. I didn't like it, but I knew I had created my own monster."

One afternoon in Tulsa, I met with two lawyers who represented some of the hundreds of plaintiffs seeking to recover damages sustained in the failure of C.F.S. In their lawsuits, they hoped to prove that C.F.S.'s misfortunes had been "foreseeable" to its chief officers. But although they seemed persuaded by their research that the company's highly leveraged financing had been conspicuously out of joint for some time before the end, they could not tell me precisely where the problem lay. Their argument was, essentially, that because C.F.S. had dissolved like a mirage it must have been a mirage, and that it had lasted as long as it had only by virtue of Bartmann's spellbinding talents.

"You were either on the boat or you were off the boat with Bill Bartmann," one lawyer said. "He's either a pure genius or purely diabolical—there's no in between." And he added, "The employees were constantly reinforced with 'You're different, you're better, you're C.F.S.' No matter who you are, if you get told that every day, and you're paid more than you ever imagined, you're going to believe and have incredible loyalty."

The lawyers did not want to be quoted by name, yet the image they drew of Bartmann as an entrepreneurial demiurge, whose charismatic power of positive thinking made it impossible to reduce his company's rise and fall to a simple equation of cold cash and bottom lines, was almost universally shared by C.F.S.-watchers. "You didn't dare believe he wouldn't do the next big thing, because he'd always just done the last one," Mickey Thompson, the vice-president in charge of economic development at the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, told me. "It's a unique human being who can build a business from nothing. Most of us are just waiting for that one great idea, and Bill's doing it time and again."

Bartmann certainly does have an uncanny gift for making those who work for him feel that they share in his powers, and are not so much employees as tribesmen, following their leader on a great odyssey toward some higher purpose. Kevin Highland, a former C.F.S. manager who now runs his own mortgage company, told me that when "everything was just clicking," Bartmann "had everyone so mesmerized or just in love with the company that we'd have picked up the building and moved it." One of Highland's fondest memories was of flying on Bartmann's jet to Chicago to watch the Bulls in the N.B.A. finals. "At the game, Sean Penn was right in front of us, Jerry Springer there to one side. Hell, I'd never have seen any of that if I didn't meet Bill Bartmann. A guy like me?" Highland said. "We used to joke, 'We'll all be drinking purple cyanide Kool-Aid soon'—like it was a cult. But it was just that Bill Bartmann was a cool guy, a real cool guy."

I talked to former C.F.S. employees who said they literally couldn't wait to go to work in the morning, and hated taking sick days, because the knowledge that they were missing out on the energy,

HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS

"Fill out this tag and attach it to your big toe."

the camaraderie, the determination, the buzz only made them feel worse. I had to remind myself that what we were talking about was, after all, a debt-collection agency.

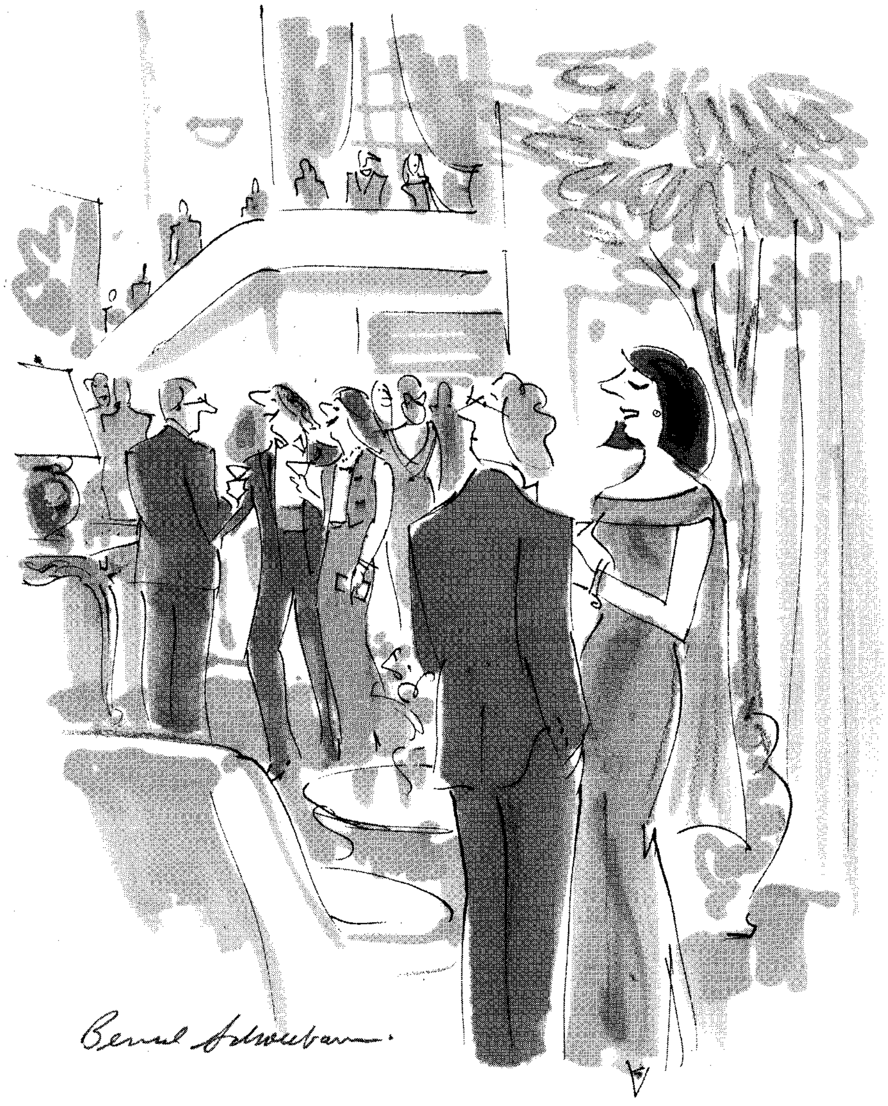
Wayne Learned, the first person Bartmann hired in 1990, when he moved the company to Tulsa, agreed: that was the wonder of it. Before he met Bartmann, Learned had been the executive vice-president of Oklahoma's largest retail bank, where he had presided over fifty branch offices and a thousand employees. By the time C.F.S. folded, Learned was the director of operations, with a salary of half a million dollars a year. But he had originally taken a substantial pay cut when he joined C.F.S., and he had done so, he told me, only because of the way Bartmann answered him at their first interview, when Learned asked him to describe his "vision" of the company's future: "He was quiet for a minute. Then he said, 'Some day, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger will work for us, and they'll be responsible for collecting debt from Third World countries.' And it struck me very powerfully, because, while it's an insane statement on its face, I knew what he meant. I mean, it just so illustrated Bill's goal to be different and to think outside the box." Learned trailed off. Then, sounding like Conrad's Marlow speaking of Kurtz, he said, "Oh, it was just the power to—the power of what he said."

I spent a week in Tulsa talking to people about Bill Bartmann, and although many had a vivid sense of his presence, and most spoke of him on a first-name basis, I had the impression that the truest thing I heard said about him was a remark by the Chamber of Commerce man, Mickey Thompson, who told me, "I don't know of anybody who knows Bartmann that well." When I asked Bartmann about that, he said Thompson was right. His life was dedicated to his business, he said, and friendship "creates a different burden, a different relationship, that clouds the employer-employee business relationship." So, except for the socializing that business requires, he doesn't care to hang out with anyone but his wife and two daughters and a few buddies with whom he rides Harley-Davidsons.

At C.F.S., Bartmann recalled, the company brass would go on quarterly strategic-planning retreats, where each participant would be asked to draw up lists of the company's strengths and weaknesses, and he told me, "Almost always, item No. 1 on both was Bill Bartmann." He described the company as "absolutely Bill-dependent," and he said, "I probably created that, not knowing how not to." But he said that he had experienced "an epiphany of sorts" in the wake of C.F.S.'s demise, and "come to understand how hollow fame and good fortune really are. The new company's going to be, I hope, remarkably different—less about me, less about Bill Bartmann, and more about just let's get a mission, let's get the job done."

As he said this, we were only a few blocks away from the blinding gold-glass towers that C.F.S. used to occupy; we sat at a bare conference table, in his new corporate headquarters, a modest six-room suite in a one-story prefab office block, adjacent to a Git 'n' Go in one of Tulsa's ubiquitous strip malls. The place had the fluorescent, unadorned atmosphere of a startup dentist's office, which fit with Bartmann's professed newfound humility. But Bartmann's ambitions sounded, if anything, more grandiose than ever. While he said that the fringe-banking industry as a whole was designed to "screw the wheels" off poor people, he described his purpose in starting Neighborhood Financial Center as a sort of economic humanitarianism—to rescue a clientele composed largely of those who have never known anything but economic hardship and exclusion.

As Bartmann described this new "mission" to me, his speech took on the rhythms of the pulpit: "You got to reach down and save them, you lower a ladder



"We hated them long before anyone else."

to them. 'Here's the ladder, I'm showing you the way up, and I'm going to help you. I'm going to provide the tools, but I'm not going to do the work'. . . . Let me be the Don Henderson"—his one-time high-school dean—"to a whole bunch of people who will never know my name."

That was the sales pitch, the "Gospel of Bill," as he called it, and it made me impatient to see N.F.C.'s flagship store, the first of a projected chain across Oklahoma and beyond, where customers could meet their financial needs in an all-in-one, Wal-Mart-like setting, and, according to the business plan, also enjoy the use of free health clinics, legal clinics, money-management counselling, and language classes. But for now the N.F.C. store consists of a mini-mall with check-cashing windows, a pawnshop, and a string of generic glass-walled offices devoted to tax preparation, loan brokering, and credit counselling, arranged around a "food court" whose sole offerings are free popcorn and "at cost" twenty-five-cent sodas. Bartmann's N.F.C. "revolution" boils down to providing these services, in the cheeriest manner, at lower rates than any of his competitors.

When it comes to fringe banking, however, "lower rates" is a relative term. The N.F.C. loan shop, which specializes in what are known as signature loans—no-collateral lending of amounts up to seven hundred and twenty dollars for no more than ten months—boasts that its interest rates are a mere ninety per cent of Oklahoma's legal maximum. That sounds like an appealing discount until you learn that the law permits lenders to charge an annualized interest rate of as high as two hundred and forty per cent. Bartmann, who runs an N.F.C. anti-loan-sharking advertising campaign in Tulsa's minority communities, concedes that this is a rate that would make even a Mafia enforcer blush. In fact, when I suggested that his discounted interest rate was still predatory, he replied, "That can be said, and it's not an inappropriate argument mathematically." Still, he explained that, as N.F.C.'s business volume increased, the plan was to cut customers' costs more substantially. In the meantime, however, he made no apologies. "It's not great," he said. "It's not even good. But it's better."

"If it says to add water, and I'm the one who adds it, I'm cooking."

• •

Such is the economy of desperation. Bartmann opened the N.F.C. store hoping to serve eleven thousand customers in the first year, and he has already had forty thousand. In January, the store cashed more than six million dollars' worth of checks, undercutting its competitors' rates of three-to-six-per-cent commissions with a flat one-per-cent take. And, in March, N.F.C. received an award for outstanding customer service from Tulsa's Better Business Bureau, a body that is traditionally the scourge of fringe-banking operators. "It doesn't buy a cup of coffee today," Bartmann said of the award, but he thought it would make a terrific impression on future investors, and he told me that he was already receiving backing from some former C.F.S. stakeholders, including several who are simultaneously suing him for past dealings.

For now, Bartmann earns no salary. He doesn't even own stock in N.F.C. His two daughters, who are in their twenties, each own forty per cent of the company, and Wayne Learned owns the rest. Bartmann's potential liability in C.F.S.-related lawsuits is such that he can't afford to earn money again until all the litigation is resolved, a process that he thinks will take another two or three years. "It will be awkward, inconvenient, embarrassing, and a hassle, and expensive," he said, but he insisted that he wasn't going to worry about it.

"I have compartmentalized my brain, so I can put things that I don't want to be an impediment in a very, very small box in a very, very dark corner of my mind," Bartmann told me. "I'm at peace with myself, and that's most important. I like me. I don't mean that in a bad or an egotistical or a glorified sense. I have hearing aids, I have ingrown toenails, I have a bad back. I mean, I can list a whole litany of deficiencies and disorders that I have, so I don't think I'm very cool. I'm old, I'm wrinkled up, and my health is not very good. But I like me." What's more, he said, "I know what's going to happen. I know how the movie ends."

"How does the movie end?" I asked, and he said, "I win." ♦

FICTION

SITTING WITH THE DEAD

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

His eyes had been closed and he opened them, saying he wanted to see the stable yard. Emily's expression was empty of response. Her face, younger than his and yet not seeming so, was empty of everything except the tiredness she felt. "From the window?" she said.

No, he'd go down, he said. "Will you get me the coat? And have the boots by the door."

She turned away from the bed. He would manage on his own if she didn't help him; she'd known him for twenty-eight years, been married to him for twenty-three. Whether or not she brought the coat up to him would make no difference, any more than it would if she protested.

"It could kill you," she said.

"The fresh air'd strengthen a man."

Downstairs, she placed the boots ready for him at the back door. She brought his cap and muffler to him with his overcoat. A stitch was needed where the left sleeve met the shoulder, she noticed. She hadn't before and knew he wouldn't wait while she repaired it now.

"What're you going to do there?" she asked, and he said nothing much. Tidy up a bit, he said.

He died eight days later, and Dr. Ann explained that tidying the stable yard with only a coat over his pajamas wouldn't have hastened anything. An hour after she left, the Geraghtys came to the house, not knowing that he was dead.

It was half past seven in the evening then. At the same time the next morning, Keane the undertaker was due. She said that to the Geraghtys, making sure they understood, not wanting them to think she was turning them away for some other reason. Although she knew that if her husband had been alive he wouldn't have agreed to have the Geraghtys at his bedside. It was a relief that they had come too late.

The Geraghtys were two middle-aged women, sisters, the Misses Geraghty, who sat with the dying. Emily had heard of them but did not know them, not even to see; they'd had to give their name when she opened the door to them. It had never occurred to her that the Geraghtys would attempt to bring their good works to the sickroom she had lived with herself for the last seven months. They were Legion of Mary women, famed for their charity, tireless in their support of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and their promulgation of the writings of Father Xavier O'Shea, a local priest who, at a young age in the eighteen-eighties, had contracted malaria in the mission fields of the East.

"We only heard of your trouble Tuesday," the thinner and smaller of the two apologized. "It does happen the occasional time we wouldn't hear."

The other woman, more robust and older, allowed herself jewelry and make-up and took more care with her clothes. But it was her quiet, sharp-featured sister who took the lead.

"We heard in MacClincy's," she said.

"I'm sorry you've had a wasted journey."

"It's never wasted." There was a pause, as if a pause was necessary here. "You have our sympathy" was added to that; the explanation of why the journey had not been in vain.

The conversation took place entirely at the hall door. Dusk was becoming dark, but over the whitewashed wall of the small front garden Emily still could see a car drawn up in the road. It was cold, the wind gone round to the east. They meant well, these women, even if they'd got everything wrong, driving out from Carra to visit a man who wouldn't have welcomed them and then arriving too late, a man whose death had spared them an embarrassment.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" Emily offered.

She imagined they'd refuse and then begin to go, saying they couldn't disturb her at a time like this. But the big, wide-shouldered one glanced at her sister, hesitating.

"If you're alone," the smaller one said, "you'd be welcome to our company. If it would be of help to you."

The dead man had been without religion. Anyone could have told them that, Emily reflected, making tea. He would have said that there was more to their sitting at the bedsides of the ill than met the eye, and she wondered if that could possibly be so. Did they in their compassionate travels hope for the first signs of the belief that often came out of nowhere when death declared its intention? Did they drive away from the houses they visited, straight to a presbytery, their duty done? She had never heard that said about the Geraghtys and she didn't want to believe it. They meant well, she said to herself again.

When they left, she wouldn't go back upstairs to look at the dead features. She'd leave him now to Keane in the morning. In the brief time that had elapsed, a day had been settled for the funeral, Thursday of next week; in the morning she would let a few people know; she'd put a notice in the *Advertiser*. No children had been born; when Thursday had passed everything would be over except for the unpaid debts. She buttered slices of brack and stirred the tea in the pot. She carried in the tray.

They hadn't taken their coats off but sat as still as statues, a little apart from each other.

"It's cold," she said. "I'll light the fire."

"Ah, no. Ah, no, don't bother." They both protested, but she did anyway, and the kindling that had been in the grate all summer flared up at once. She poured their tea, asking if they took sugar, and then offering the slices of currant loaf. They began to call her Emily, as if they knew her well. They gave their own names: Kathleen, the older sister, and Norah.

"I didn't think," Kathleen began to say, and Norah interrupted her.

"Oh, we know all right," she said. "You're Protestant here, but that never made a difference yet."

They had sat with the Methodist minister, the Reverend Wolfe, Kathleen said. They'd read to him, they'd brought in whatever he wanted. They were there when he went.

"Never a difference," Norah repeated, and in turn they took a slice of brack. They commented on it, saying it was excellent.

"It isn't easy," Kathleen said when the conversation lapsed. "The first few hours. We often stay."

"It was good of you to think of him."

"It's cheerful with that fire, Emily," Kathleen said.

They asked her about the horses, because the horses were what they'd heard about, and she explained that they'd become a thing of the past. She'd sell the place now, she said.

"You'd find it remote, Emily," Kathleen said. Her lipstick had left a trace on the rim of the teacup and Norah drew her attention to it with a gesture. Kathleen wiped it off. "We're town people ourselves," she said.

Emily didn't consider the house she'd lived in for nearly thirty years remote. Five minutes in the car and you were in the middle of Carra. Mangan's Bridge, in the other direction, was no more than a minute.

"You get used to a place," Emily said.

They identified for her the house where they lived themselves, on the outskirts of Carra, on the Athy road. Emily knew it, a pleasant creeper-covered house with silver railings in front of it, not big but prosperous-looking. She'd thought it was Corrigan's, the surveyor's.

"I don't know why I thought that."

"We bought it from Mr. Corrigan," Norah said, "when we came to Carra three years ago." And her sister said they'd been living in Athy before that.

"Carra was what we were looking for," Norah said.

They were endeavoring to lift her spirits, Emily realized, by keeping things light. Carra had improved in their time, they said, and it would again. You could tell with a town; some of them wouldn't rise out of the doldrums while a century'd go by.

"You'd maybe come into Carra now?" Kathleen said.

"I don't know what I'll do."

She poured more tea. She handed round the brack again. Dr. Ann had given her pills to take, but she didn't intend to take them. Exhausted as she was, she didn't want to sleep.

"He went out a week ago," she said. "He got up and went out to the yard with only a coat over his pajamas. I thought it was that that hurried it on, but seemingly it wasn't."

They didn't say anything, just nod-

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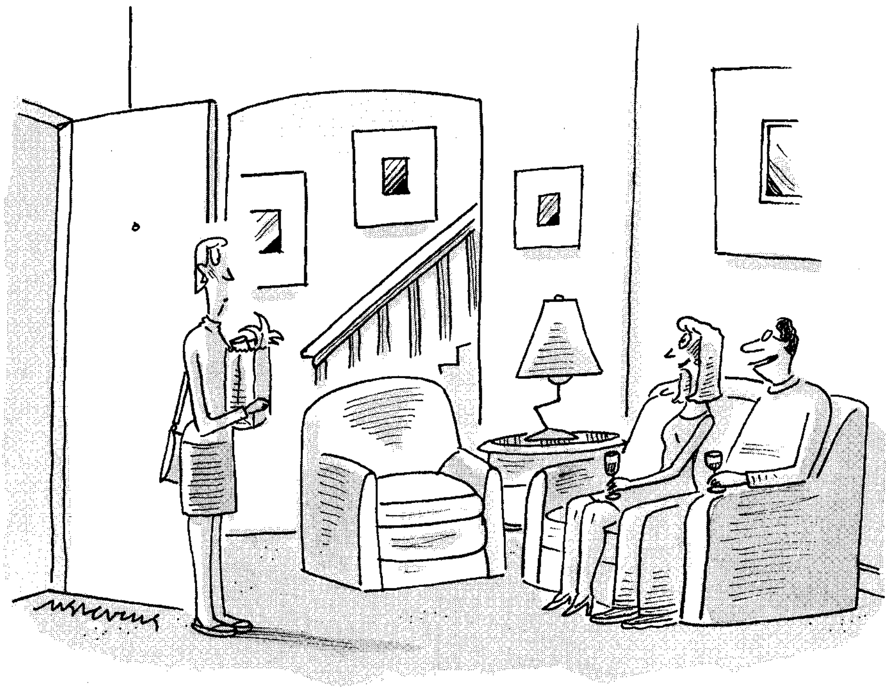


"Meet Carla, honey—our new roommate."

ded, both of them. She said he had been seven months dying. He hadn't read a newspaper all that time, she said. In the end, the only food he could manage was corn-flour gruel.

"We never knew your husband," Norah said, "any more than yourself. Although I think we maybe met him on the road one day."

A feeling of apprehension began in Emily, a familiar dread that compulsively caused one hand to clench the other, fingers tightly locking. People often met him, as he was exercising one of the horses. A car would slow down for him, but he never acknowledged it, never so much as raised the crop. For a moment she forgot that he was dead.

"He was often out," she said.

"Oh, this was long ago."

"He sold the last of the horses twelve months ago. He didn't want them left."

"He raced his horses, we're to understand?" Kathleen said.

"Point-to-points. Punchestown the odd time."

"Well, that's great."

"There wasn't much success."

"It's an up-and-down business, of course."

Disappointment had filled the house when yet again a horse had failed, when months of preparation went for nothing. There had never been much reason for optimism, but even so expectation had been high, as if anything less would have brought bad luck. When Emily married, her husband had been training a string of yearlings on the Curragh. Doing well, he'd said himself, although in fact he wasn't.

"You never had children, Emily?" Kathleen asked.

"No, we never did."

"I think we heard that said."

The house had been left to her by an aunt on her mother's side. Forty-three acres, sheep kept; and the furniture had been left to her, too. "I used to come here as a child. A Miss Edgill my aunt was. Did you hear of her?"

They shook their heads. Way before their time, Kathleen said, looking around her. A good house, she said.

"She'd no one else to leave it to." And Emily didn't add that neither the property nor the land would ever have become hers if her aunt had suspected she'd marry the man she had.

"You'll let it go, though?" Kathleen pursued her inquiries, doing her best to knit together a conversation. "The way things are now, you were saying you'd let it go?"

"I don't know."

"Anyone would require a bit of time."

"We see a lot of widowing," Norah murmured.

"Nearly to the day, we were married twenty-three years."

"God took him because he wanted him, Emily."

The Geraghtys continued to offer sympathy, one following the other in what was said, the difference in tone and manner continuing also. And again—and more often as more solace was pressed upon her—Emily reflected how fortunate it was that they had escaped the awkwardness of attempting to keep company with her husband. He would have called her back as soon as she'd left them with him. He would have asked her who they were, although he knew; he would have told her to take them away. He'd never minded what he said—the flow of coarse language when someone crossed one of the fields, every word shouted out, frighteningly sometimes. It was always that: raising his voice, the expressions he used; not once, not ever, had there been violence. Yet often she had wished that there had been, believing that violence would have been easier to bear than the power of his articulated anger. It was power she had always felt coming from him, festering and then released, his denial of his failure.

"The horses. Punchestown. The world of the racecourse," Kathleen said. "You've had an interesting life, Emily."

It seemed to Emily that Norah was about to shake her head, that for the first time the sisters were on the verge of a disagreement. It didn't surprise her; the observation that had been made astonished her.

"Unusual is what my sister means." Norah nodded her correction into place, her tone softening the contradiction.

"There's many a woman doesn't get out and about," Kathleen said.

Emily poured more tea and added turf to the fire. She had forgotten to draw the curtains over and she did so now. The light in the room was dim; he'd been particular about low-wattage electric bulbs. But the dimness made the room cozy and it seemed wrong that anywhere should seem so while he lay only a few hours dead. She wondered what she'd do when another bulb went, either here or somewhere else, if she would replace it with a stronger one or if low-wattage light was part of her now. She wondered if her nervousness was part of her, too. It didn't seem that it had always been, but she knew she could be wrong about that.

"I didn't go out and about much," she said because a silence in the conversation had come. Both visitors were stirring sugar into their tea. When their teaspoons were laid down, Norah said, "There's some wouldn't bother with that."

"He was a difficult man. People would have told you."

They did not contradict that. They did not say anything. She said, "He put his trust in the horses. Since childhood, what he wanted was to win races, to be known for it. But he never managed much."

"Poor man," Kathleen murmured. "Poor man."

Emily shouldn't have said what she had, she hadn't meant to. She tried to say that, but the words wouldn't come. She looked away from the women who had visited her, gazing about her at the furniture of a room she knew too well. He had been angry when she'd taken the curtains down to wash them; everyone staring in, he'd said, and she hadn't known what he'd meant. Hardly anyone passed by on the road.

"He married me for the house," she said, unable to prevent herself from saying that, too. The women were strangers, she was speaking ill of the dead. She shook her head in an effort to deny what she'd said, but that seemed to be a dishonesty, worse than speaking ill.

The women sipped their tea, both lifting the cups to their lips in the same moment.

"He married me for the forty acres," Emily said, compelled again to say what she didn't want to. "I was a Protestant girl that got passed by until he made a bid for me and I thought it was romantic, like he did himself—the race cards, the race ribbons, the jockeys' colors, the big crowd there'd be. That's how it happened."

"Ah, now, now," Kathleen said. "Ah, now, dear."

"I was a fool and you pay for foolishness. I was greedy for what marriage might be, and you pay for greed. We'd a half acre left after what was paid back a year ago. There's a mortgage he took out on the house. I could have said to him all the time he was dying, 'What'll I do?' But I didn't, and he didn't say anything, either. God knows what his last thoughts were," Emily said.

They told her she was upset. One after the other, they told her any widow would be, that it was what you had to expect. Norah said it twice. Kathleen said she could call on them.

"There's no grief in the house you've come to."

"Ah, now, now," Kathleen said, her big face puckered in distress. "Ah, now."

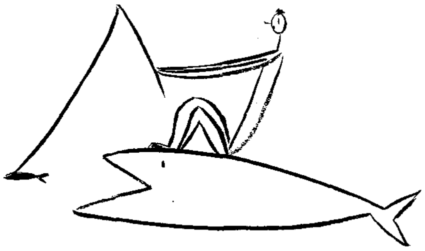
"He never minded how the truth came out, whether he'd say it or not. He didn't say I was a worthless woman, but you'd see it in his eyes. Another time, I'd sweep the stable yard and he'd say what use was that. He'd push a plate of food away untouched. We had two collies once and they were company. When they died, he said he'd never have another dog. The vet wouldn't come near us. The man who came to read the meter turned surly under the abuse he got for driving his van into the yard."

"There's good and bad in everyone, Emily." Norah whispered that opinion and, still whispering, repeated it.

"Stay where you are, Emily," Kathleen said, "and I'll make another pot of tea."

She stood up, the teapot already in her hand. She was used to making tea in other people's kitchens. She'd find her way about, she said.

Emily protested, but even while she did she didn't care. In all the years of her marriage, another woman hadn't made tea in that kitchen, and she imagined him walking in from the yard and finding someone other than herself there. The time she began to paint the scullery, it frightened her when he stood in the doorway, before he even said a thing. The time she dropped the sugar bag and the sugar spilled out all over the floor, he watched her sweeping it onto the dustpan, turf dust going with it. He said what was she doing, throwing it away when it was still fit to stir into your tea? The scullery had stayed half painted to this day.



"He lived in a strangeness of his own," Emily said to the sister who was left in the room with her. "Even when he was old, he believed a horse could still reclaim him. Even when the only one left was diseased and fit for nothing. When there was none there at all, he scoured the empty stables and got fresh straw in. He had it in mind to begin all over again, to find some animal going cheap. He never said it, but it was what he had in mind."

The house wasn't clean. It hadn't been clean for years. She'd lost heart in the house, and in herself, in the radio that didn't work, her bicycle with the tires punctured. These visitors would have noticed that the summer flies weren't swept up, that nowhere was dusted.

"Three spoons and one for the pot," Kathleen said, setting the teapot down in the hearth. "Is that about right, Emily? Will we let it draw a minute?"

Kathleen had cut more slices of currant loaf, finding it on the breadboard, the bread saw beside it, the butter there, too. She hoped it wasn't a presumption, she hoped it wasn't interference, she said, but all that remained unanswered.

"He'd sit there looking at me," Emily said. "His eyes would follow me about the kitchen. There was a beetle got on the table once and he didn't move. It got into the flour and he didn't reach out for it."

"Isn't it a wonder," Norah said, "you wouldn't have gone off, the way things were, Emily? Not that I'm saying you should have."

Emily was aware that the question was asked. She didn't answer it; she didn't know why she hadn't gone off. Looking back on it, she didn't. But she remembered how when she had thought of going away what her arguments to herself had been, how she had wondered where she could go to, and had told herself it would be wrong to leave a house that had been left to her in good faith and with affection. And then, of course, there was the worry about how he'd manage.

"Will you take another cup, Emily?"

She shook her head. The wind had become stronger. She could hear it rattling the doors upstairs. She'd left a light burning in the room.

"I'm wrong to delay you," she said.

But the Geraghtys had settled down again, with the fresh tea to sustain them. She wasn't delaying them in any way whatsoever, Kathleen said. In the shadowy illumination of the single forty-watt bulb, the alarm clock on the mantelpiece gave the time as twenty past eleven, although in fact it was half an hour later.

"It's just I'm tired," Emily said. "A time like this, I didn't mean to go on about what's done with."

Kathleen said it was the shock. The shock of death changed everything, she said; no matter how certainly death was expected, it was always a shock.

"I wouldn't want you to think I didn't love my husband."

The sisters were taken aback, Kathleen on her knees adding turf to the fire, Norah pouring milk into her tea. How could these two unmarried women understand? Emily thought. How could they understand that even if there was neither grief nor mourning there had been some love left for the man who'd died? Her fault, her foolishness from the first it had been; no one had made her do anything.

The talk went on, back and forth between the widow and the sisters, words and commiseration, solace and reassurance. The past came into it when more was said: the wedding, his polished shoes and shiny hair, the party afterward over on the Curragh, at Jockey Hall, because he knew the man there. People were spoken of, names known to the Geraghtys, or people before their time; occasions were spoken of—the year he went to Cheltenham, the shooting of the old gray when her leg went at Glanbyre point-to-point. The Geraghtys spoke of their growing up in Galway, how you wouldn't recognize the City of the Tribes these days, so fashionable and lively it had become; how later they had lived near Enniscorthy; how Kathleen had felt the draw of the religious life at that time but then had felt the receding of it, how she had known ever since that she'd been tested with her own mistake. In this way, the Geraghtys spread themselves into the conversation. As the night went on, Emily was aware that they were doing so because it was necessary, on a bleak occasion, to influence the bleakness in other ways. She apologized for speaking ill of the dead, and blamed herself again. It was half past three before the Geraghtys left.

"Thank you," she said, holding open the hall door. The wind that had been slight and then had got up wasn't there anymore. The air was fresh and clean. She said she'd be all right.

Light flickered in the car when the women opened the doors. There was the red glow of the tail-light before the engine started up, a whiff of exhaust before the car moved slowly forward and gathered speed.

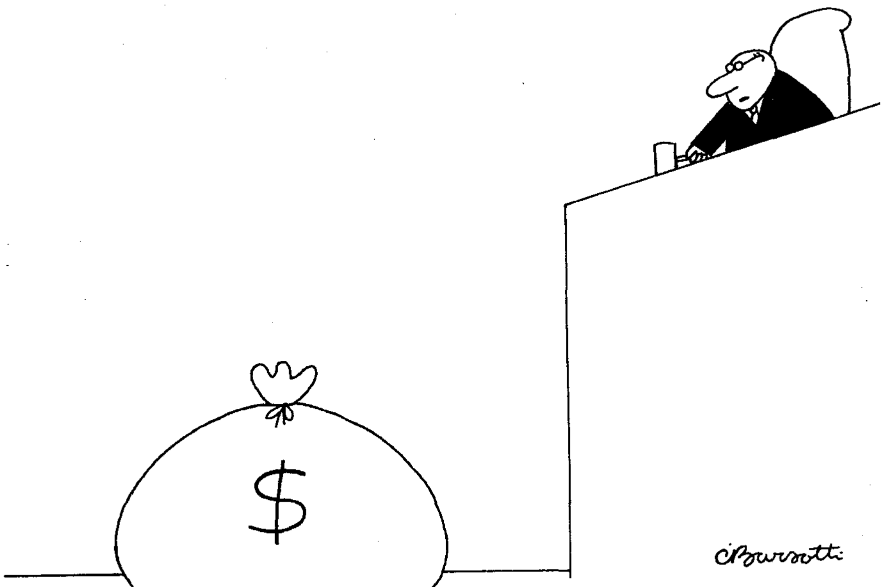
In the room upstairs, the sheet drawn up over the raddled, stiffening features, Emily prayed. She knelt by the bedside and pleaded for the deliverance of the husband who had wronged her for so long. Fear had drained to a husk the love she had spoken of, but she did not deny that remnant's existence, as she had not in the company of her visitors. She could not grieve, she could not mourn; too little was left, too much destroyed. Would they know that as they drove away? Would they explain it to people when people asked?

Downstairs, she washed up the cups and saucers. She would not sleep. She would not go to bed. The hours would pass and then the undertaker's man would come.

The headlights illuminated low stone walls, ragwort thriving on the verges, gorse among the motionless sheep in gated fields. Kathleen drove, as she always did, Norah never having learned. A visit had not before turned out so strangely, so different from what had been the sisters' familiar expectation. They said all that, and then were silent for a while before Kathleen made her final comment: that what they had heard had been all the more terrible to listen to with a man dead in an upstairs room.

Hunched in the dark of the car, Norah frowned over that. She did not speak immediately, but when they'd gone another mile she said, "I'd say, myself, it was the dead we were sitting with."

In the house, the silence there had been before the visitors disturbed it was there again. No spectre rose from the carnal remains of the man who was at last at peace. But the woman sitting by the turf fire she kept going was aware, as dawn lightened the edges of the curtains, of a stirring in her senses. Her tiredness afflicted her less, a calm possessed her. In the neglected room, she regretted nothing now of what she had said to the women who had meant well; nor did it matter if, here and there, they had not quite understood. She sat for a while longer, then pulled the curtains back and the day came in. Hers was the ghost the night had brought, in her own image as she once had been. ♦



"Not guilty."

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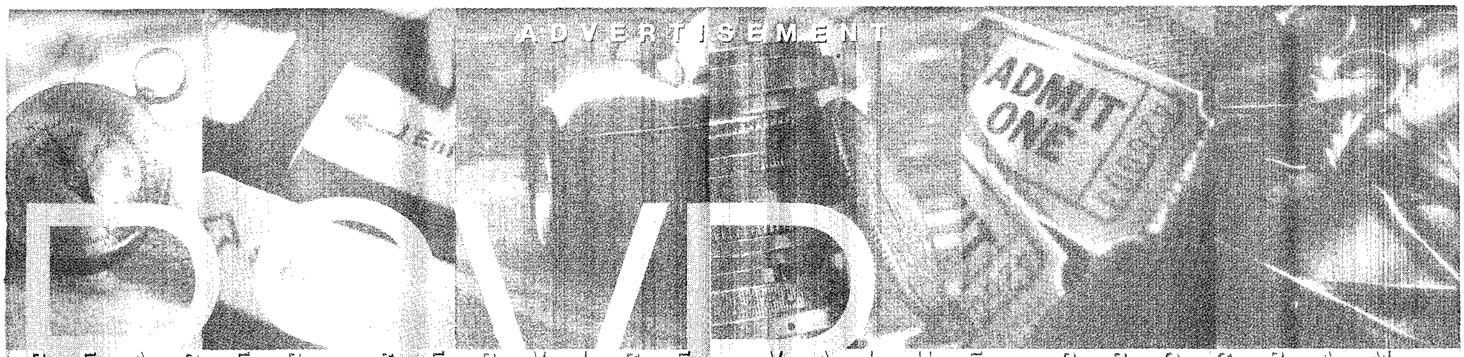

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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

JAVA MAN

How caffeine created the modern world.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

The original Coca-Cola was a late-nineteenth-century concoction known as Pemberton's French Wine Coca, a mixture of alcohol, the caffeine-rich kola nut, and coca, the raw ingredient of cocaine. In the face of social pressure, first the wine and then the coca were removed, leaving the more banal modern beverage in its place: carbonated, caffeinated sugar water with less kick to it than a cup of coffee. But is that the way we think of Coke? Not at all. In the nineteen-thirties, a commercial artist named Haddon Sundblom had the bright idea of posing a portly retired friend of his in a red Santa Claus suit with a Coke in his hand, and plastering the image on billboards and advertisements across the country. Coke, magically, was reborn as caffeine for children, caffeine without any of the weighty adult connotations of coffee and tea. It was—as the ads with Sundblom's Santa put it—"the pause that refreshes." It added life. It could teach the world to sing.

One of the things that have always made drugs so powerful is their cultural adaptability, their way of acquiring meanings beyond their pharmacology. We think of marijuana, for example, as a drug of lethargy, of disaffection. But in Colombia, the historian David T. Courtwright points out in "Forces of Habit" (Harvard; $24.95), "peasants boast that cannabis helps them to *quita el cansancio* or reduce fatigue; increase their *fuerza* and *ánimo*, force and spirit; and become *incansable*, tireless." In Germany right after the Second World War, cigarettes briefly and suddenly became the equivalent of crack cocaine. "Up to a point, the majority of the habitual smokers preferred to do without food even under extreme conditions of nutrition rather than to forgo tobacco," according to one account of the period. "Many housewives . . . bartered fat and sugar for cigarettes." Even a drug as demonized as opium has been seen in a more favorable light. In the eighteen-thirties, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's grandfather Warren Delano II made the family fortune exporting the drug to China, and Delano was able to sugar-coat his activities so plausibly that no one ever accused his grandson of being the scion of a drug lord. And yet, as Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer remind us in their marvellous new book "The World of Caffeine" (Routledge; $27.50), there is no drug quite as effortlessly adaptable as caffeine, the Zelig of chemical stimulants.

At one moment, in one form, it is the drug of choice of café intellectuals and artists; in another, of housewives; in another, of Zen monks; and, in yet another, of children enthralled by a fat man who slides down chimneys. King Gustav III, who ruled Sweden in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was so convinced of the particular perils of coffee over all other forms of caffeine that he devised an elaborate experiment. A convicted murderer was sentenced to drink cup after cup of coffee until he died, with another murderer sentenced to a lifetime of tea drinking, as a control. (Unfortunately, the two doctors in charge of the study died before anyone else did; then Gustav was murdered; and finally the tea drinker died, at eighty-three, of old age—leaving the original murderer alone with his espresso, and leaving coffee's supposed toxicity in some doubt.) Later, the various forms of caffeine began to be divided up along sociological lines. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, in his book "Tastes of Paradise," argues that, in the eighteenth century, coffee symbolized the rising middle classes, whereas its great caffeinated rival in those years—cocoa, or, as it was known at the time, chocolate—was the drink of the aristocracy. "Goethe, who used art as a means to lift himself out of his middle class background into the aristocracy, and who as a member of a courtly society maintained a sense of aristocratic calm even in the midst of immense productivity, made a cult of chocolate, and avoided coffee," Schivelbusch writes. "Balzac, who despite his sentimental allegiance to the monarchy, lived and labored for the literary marketplace and for it alone, became one of the most excessive coffee-drinkers in history. Here we see two fundamentally different working styles and means of stimulation—fundamentally different psychologies and physiologies." Today, of course, the chief cultural distinction is between coffee and tea, which, according to a list drawn up by Weinberg and Bealer, have come to represent almost entirely opposite sensibilities:

Coffee Aspect	*Tea Aspect*
Male	Female
Boisterous	Decorous
Indulgence	Temperance
Hardheaded	Romantic
Topology	Geometry
Heidegger	Carnap
Beethoven	Mozart
Libertarian	Statist
Promiscuous	Pure

That the American Revolution began with the symbolic rejection of tea in Boston Harbor, in other words, makes perfect sense. Real revolutionaries would naturally prefer coffee. By contrast, the freedom fighters of Canada, a hundred years later, were most definitely tea drinkers. And where was

MARISCAL

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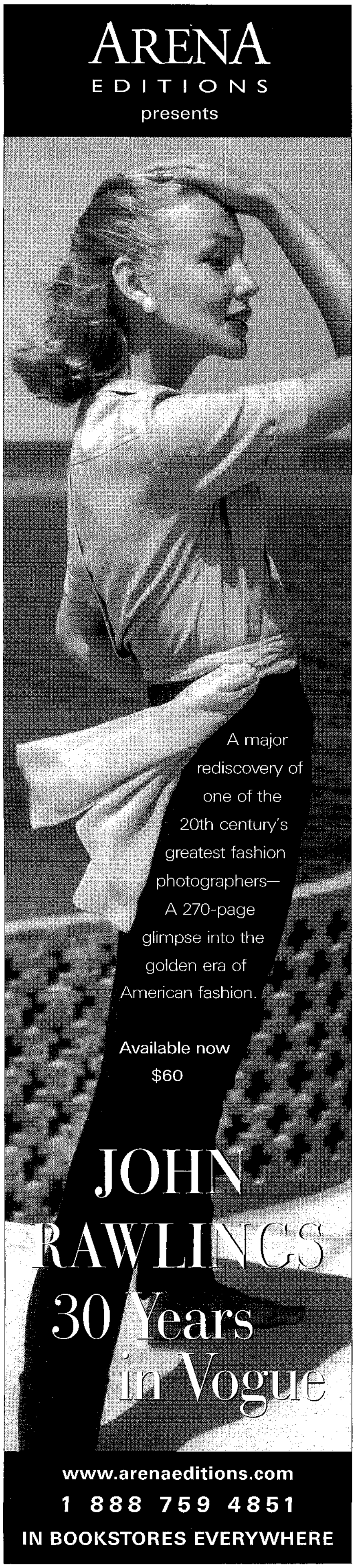
By enabling people to coördinate their work schedules, the favored drug of café society helped lead to the industrial revolution.



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Canada's autonomy won? Not on the blood-soaked fields of Lexington and Concord but in the genteel drawing rooms of Westminster, over a nice cup of Darjeeling and small, triangular cucumber sandwiches.

All this is a bit puzzling. We don't fetishize the difference between salmon eaters and tuna eaters, or people who like their eggs sunny-side up and those who like them scrambled. So why invest so much importance in the way people prefer their caffeine? A cup of coffee has somewhere between a hundred and two hundred and fifty milligrams; black tea brewed for four minutes has between forty and a hundred milligrams. But the disparity disappears if you consider that many tea drinkers drink from a pot, and have more than one cup. Caffeine is caffeine. "The more it is pondered," Weinberg and Bealer write, "the more paradoxical this duality within the culture of caffeine appears. After all, both coffee and tea are aromatic infusions of vegetable matter, served hot or cold in similar quantities; both are often mixed with cream or sugar; both are universally available in virtually any grocery or restaurant in civilized society; and both contain the identical psychoactive alkaloid stimulant, caffeine."

It would seem to make more sense to draw distinctions based on the way caffeine is metabolized rather than on the way it is served. Caffeine, whether it is in coffee or tea or a soft drink, moves easily from the stomach and intestines into the bloodstream, and from there to the organs, and before long has penetrated almost every cell of the body. This is the reason that caffeine is such a wonderful stimulant. Most substances can't cross the blood-brain barrier, which is the body's defensive mechanism, preventing viruses or toxins from entering the central nervous system. Caffeine does so easily. Within an hour or so, it reaches its peak concentration in the brain, and there it does a number of things—principally, blocking the action of adenosine, the neuromodulator that makes you sleepy, lowers your blood pressure, and slows down your heartbeat. Then, as quickly as it builds up in your brain and tissues, caffeine is gone—which is why it's so safe. (Caffeine in ordinary quantities has never been conclusively linked to serious illness.)

But how quickly it washes away differs dramatically from person to person. A two-hundred-pound man who drinks a cup of coffee with a hundred milligrams of caffeine will have a maximum caffeine concentration of one milligram per kilogram of body weight. A hundred-pound woman having the same cup of coffee will reach a caffeine concentration of two milligrams per kilogram of body weight, or twice as high. In addition, when women are on the Pill, the rate at which they clear caffeine from their bodies slows considerably. (Some of the side effects experienced by women on the Pill may in fact be caffeine jitters caused by their sudden inability to tolerate as much coffee as they could before.) Pregnancy reduces a woman's ability to process caffeine still further. The half-life of caffeine in an adult is roughly three and a half hours. In a pregnant woman, it's eighteen hours. (Even a four-month-old child processes caffeine more efficiently.) An average man and woman sitting down for a cup of coffee are thus not pharmaceutical equals: in effect, the woman is under the influence of a vastly more powerful drug. Given these differences, you'd think that, instead of contrasting the caffeine cultures of tea and coffee, we'd contrast the caffeine cultures of men and women.

But we don't, and with good reason. To parse caffeine along gender lines does not do justice to its capacity to insinuate itself into every aspect of our lives, not merely to influence culture but even to create it. Take coffee's reputation as the "thinker's" drink. This dates from eighteenth-century Europe, where coffeehouses played a major role in the egalitarian, inclusionary spirit that was then sweeping the continent. They sprang up first in London, so alarming Charles II that in 1676 he tried to ban them. It didn't work. By 1700, there were hundreds of coffeehouses in London, their subversive spirit best captured by a couplet from a comedy of the period: "In a coffeehouse just now among the rabble / I bluntly asked, which is the treason table." The movement then spread to Paris, and by the end of the eighteenth century coffeehouses numbered in the hundreds—most famously, the Café de la Régence, near the Palais Royal, which counted among its customers Robespierre, Napoleon, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Rousseau, and the Duke of Richelieu. Previously, when men had gathered together to talk in public places, they had done so in bars, which drew from specific socioeconomic niches and, because of the alcohol they served, created a specific kind of talk. The new coffeehouses, by contrast, drew from many different classes and trades, and they served a stimulant, not a depressant. "It is not extravagant to claim that it was in these gathering spots that the art of conversation became the basis of a new literary style and that a new ideal of general education in letters was born," Weinberg and Bealer write.

It is worth noting, as well, that in the original coffeehouses nearly everyone smoked, and nicotine also has a distinctive physiological effect. It moderates mood and extends attention, and, more important, it doubles the rate of caffeine metabolism: it allows you to drink twice as much coffee as you could otherwise. In other words, the original coffeehouse was a place where men of all types could sit all day; the tobacco they smoked made it possible to drink coffee all day; and the coffee they drank inspired them to talk all day. Out of this came the Enlightenment. (The next time we so perfectly married pharmacology and place, we got Joan Baez.)

In time, caffeine moved from the café to the home. In America, coffee triumphed because of the country's proximity to the new Caribbean and Latin American coffee plantations, and the fact that throughout the nineteenth century duties were negligible. Beginning in the eighteen-twenties, Courtwright tells us, Brazil "unleashed a flood of slave-produced coffee. American per capita consumption, three pounds per year in 1830, rose to eight pounds by 1859."

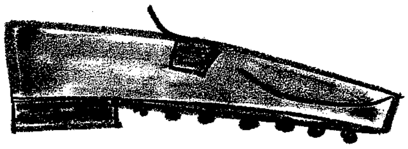
What this flood of caffeine did, according to Weinberg and Bealer, was to abet the process of industrialization—to help "large numbers of people to coordinate their work schedules by giving them the energy to start work at a given

BRIEFLY NOTED

Little America, *by Henry Bromell (Knopf; $24).* In 1958, the C.I.A. agent Mack Hooper is posted to the desert kingdom of Kurash to save one small corner of the world from Communism. While Mack befriends its ruler, a twenty-two-year-old playboy enamored of fast cars, his ten-year-old son, Terry, plays doctor with the daughters of other spies in the Kurashian suburbs. Forty years later, Terry hunts through declassified documents for the truth about his father's role in the assassination of the king and the ultimate erasure of Kurash from the map. Bromell's critique of Cold War culture is more wistful than outraged, and his generosity makes his characters ring true: the C.I.A. station chief breaking down at a cocktail party while playing charades; the boyish king struggling to reconcile his nomadic heritage with his shiny Corvette.

Flight of the Swan, *by Rosario Ferré (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* In the tumult of 1917, a touring Russian ballet troupe is stranded in Puerto Rico, where the dancers, bred in ice and snow, blossom in the island's perpetual heat. Even the company's imperious star, Madame Niura, enters into a folie à deux with Diamantino, a dashing revolutionary eighteen years her junior. But this delightful novel, waspishly narrated by Madame's acolyte Masha (who turns out to have an agenda of her own), is more than pure froth; Ferré's subject, which she handles with great delicacy, is really the intricate demands of loyalty amid extenuating circumstances.

The Catsitters, *by James Wolcott (HarperCollins; $25).* Johnny Downs is a New York bartender who longs to be a successful actor. Dumped by his girlfriend for reasons that he can't quite grasp, Johnny licks his wounds and takes solace from Darlene Ryder, a straight-talking graduate student whose interest in Johnny is romantic without being sexual: Darlene becomes a kind of relationship coach, offering him counsel in matters of the heart. Wolcott, known for his nasty and hilarious journalistic criticism, is significantly more housebroken in his début as a novelist. His wit remains intact—particularly when skewering the world of out-of-work actors—but in the end Johnny's romantic life doesn't make for compelling reading: like much else here, he is at once too familiar and too blurry to leave much of an impression.



Afterimage, *by Helen Humphreys (Metropolitan; $23).* It's 1865, in England, and both Isabelle Dashell and her husband, Eldon, are making pictures. She's intent on mastering a new medium, photography, and he's seeking renown as a cartographer. When Annie Phelan, a sober beauty orphaned by the Irish famine, answers their ad for a housemaid, she becomes Isabelle's muse and Eldon's confidante, and finds herself pressed into the service of art. Inspired by the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, this urgent, well-made novel charts the boundaries where light becomes shadow, and the known can suddenly appear awful and astonishing.

Fearless Jones, *by Walter Mosley (Little, Brown; $24.95).* Mosley's latest mystery is narrated by Paris Minton, a black man who sells used books in nineteen-fifties L.A. Paris's life is perfect—he reads all day without interruption—until a bewitching young woman named Elana Love walks through his door. She's looking for a religious group called the Messenger of the Divine, but the thug who bursts in after her is looking for a bond worth thousands of dollars. Mayhem and seduction ensue, and when Paris's bookstore is burned to the ground, he knows it's time to seek the aid of the incomparable Fearless Jones. The unlikely friendship of these men—Fearless is all fists and testosterone, Paris is a gun-shy truth-seeker—is the source of the novel's humor, and propels the reader through the plot's knottier moments.

time and continue it as long as necessary." Until the eighteenth century, it must be remembered, many Westerners drank beer almost continuously, even beginning their day with something called "beer soup." (Bealer and Weinberg helpfully provide the following eighteenth-century German recipe: "Heat the beer in a saucepan; in a separate small pot beat a couple of eggs. Add a chunk of butter to the hot beer. Stir in some cool beer to cool it, then pour over the eggs. Add a bit of salt, and finally mix all the ingredients together, whisking it well to keep it from curdling.") Now they began each day with a strong cup of coffee. One way to explain the industrial revolution is as the inevitable consequence of a world where people suddenly preferred being jittery to being drunk. In the modern world, there was no other way to keep up. That's what Edison meant when he said that genius was ninety-nine per cent perspiration and one per cent inspiration. In the old paradigm, working with your mind had been associated with leisure. It was only the poor who worked hard. (The quintessential pre-industrial narrative of inspiration belonged to Archimedes, who made his discovery, let's not forget, while taking a bath.) But Edison was saying that the old class distinctions no longer held true—that in the industrialized world there was as much toil associated with the life of the mind as there had once been with the travails of the body.

In the twentieth century, the professions transformed themselves accordingly: medicine turned the residency process into an ordeal of sleeplessness, the legal profession borrowed a page from the manufacturing floor and made its practitioners fill out time cards like union men. Intellectual heroics became a matter of endurance. "The pace of computation was hectic," James Gleick writes of the Manhattan Project in "Genius," his biography of the physicist Richard Feynman. "Feynman's day began at 8:30 and ended fifteen hours later. Sometimes he could not leave the computing center at all. He worked through for thirty-one hours once and the next day found that an error minutes after he went to bed had stalled the whole team. The routine allowed just a few breaks." Did Feynman's achievements reflect a greater natural talent than his less productive forebears had? Or did he just drink a lot more coffee? Paul Hoffman, in "The Man Who Loved Only Numbers," writes of the legendary twentieth-century mathematician Paul Erdös that "he put in nineteen-hour days, keeping himself fortified with 10 to 20 milligrams of Benzedrine or Ritalin, strong espresso and caffeine tablets. 'A mathematician,' Erdös was fond of saying, 'is a machine for turning coffee into theorems.' " Once, a friend bet Erdös five hundred dollars that he could not quit amphetamines for a month. Erdös took the bet and won, but, during his time of abstinence, he found himself incapable of doing any serious work. "You've set mathematics back a month," he told his friend when he collected, and immediately returned to his pills.

Erdös's unadulterated self was less real and less familiar to him than his adulterated self, and that is a condition that holds, more or less, for the rest of society as well. Part of what it means to be human in the modern age is that we have come to construct our emotional and cognitive states not merely from the inside out—with thought and intention—but from the outside in, with chemical additives. The modern personality is, in this sense, a synthetic creation: skillfully regulated and medicated and dosed with caffeine so that we can always be awake and alert and focussed when we need to be. On a bet, no doubt, we could walk away from caffeine if we had to. But what would be the point? The lawyers wouldn't make their billable hours. The young doctors would fall behind in their training. The physicists might still be stuck out in the New Mexico desert. We'd set the world back a month.

That the modern personality is synthetic is, of course, a disquieting notion. When we talk of synthetic personality—or of constructing new selves through chemical means—we think of hard drugs, not caffeine. Timothy Leary used to make such claims about LSD, and the reason his revolution never took flight was that most of us found the concept of tuning in, turning on, and dropping out to be a bit creepy. Here was this shaman, this visionary—and yet, if his consciousness was so great, why was he so intent on altering it? More important, what exactly were we supposed to be tuning in to? We were given hints, with psychedelic colors and deep readings of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," but that was never enough. If we are to re-create ourselves, we would like to know what we will become.

Caffeine is the best and most useful of our drugs because in every one of its forms it can answer that question precisely. It is a stimulant that blocks the action of adenosine, and comes in a multitude of guises, each with a ready-made story attached, a mixture of history and superstition and whimsy which infuses the daily ritual of adenosine blocking with meaning and purpose. Put caffeine in a red can and it becomes refreshing fun. Brew it in a teapot and it becomes romantic and decorous. Extract it from little brown beans and, magically, it is hardheaded and potent. "There was a little known Russian émigré, Trotsky by name, who during World War I was in the habit of playing chess in Vienna's Café Central every evening," Bealer and Weinberg write, in one of the book's many fascinating café yarns:

> A typical Russian refugee, who talked too much but seemed utterly harmless, indeed, a pathetic figure in the eyes of the Viennese. One day in 1917 an official of the Austrian Foreign Ministry rushed into the minister's room, panting and excited, and told his chief, "Your excellency . . . Your excellency . . . Revolution has broken out in Russia." The minister, less excitable and less credulous than his official, rejected such a wild claim and retorted calmly, "Go away . . . Russia is not a land where revolutions break out. Besides, who on earth would make a revolution in Russia? Perhaps Herr Trotsky from the Café Central?"

The minister should have known better. Give a man enough coffee and he's capable of anything. ♦

Letter from the Lincoln County School District, in Oregon.

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are working diligently to address the attendance problem but we need the involvement of the parents. We need your help getting the students to school. We cannot provide an education to a student that is not here to receive it. Students who attend regularly have an advantage over students who have psoriatic attendance.

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BOOKS

THE UNWANTED GUEST

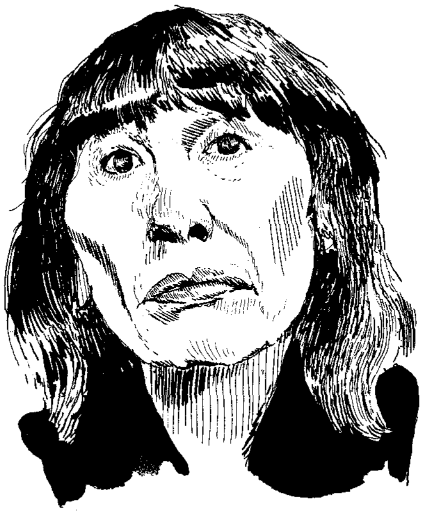
In a new novel, Boswell's "Life of Johnson" meets "Mommie Dearest."

BY NAOMI BLIVEN

The death of Samuel Johnson, in 1784, set off a competition among biographers in which James Boswell triumphed; specialists study the other lives, but general readers continue to trust and enjoy "The Life of Samuel Johnson." Boswell's beloved hero was so poor that he had to leave Oxford without taking a degree, and yet he became one of the most learned men of his time; he overcame his various ailments and idiosyncrasies to win admiration as a poet, essayist, and critic and as the creator of the first good English dictionary. He was domineering and dogmatic but generous, even in the decades when his reputation was much greater than his remuneration. Above all, Boswell's Johnson was a champion talker, and his biography is like an enormously entertaining conversation in which the subject shines among his noted companions. But in a painfully persuasive new novel, "According to Queeney" (Carroll & Graf; $22), Beryl Bainbridge presents Johnson as an obnoxious celebrity surrounded by obsequious hangers-on.

Bainbridge has borrowed her heroine, Queeney Thrale, from history. The oldest child of Hester Thrale and her husband, Henry, a brewer and Tory M.P., Queeney grew up with Johnson practically living in her home. She was just a few months old when her parents met the famous writer, in 1765, and the Thrales quickly proved to be admiring and hospitable friends: Johnson had rooms of his own in both the family house in London and their country villa at Streatham. This cozy arrangement fell apart only when Henry died, in 1781. Hester then defied her family and friends to marry Gabriel Piozzi, an impoverished Italian singer and music teacher. By then a teen-ager, Queeney, having failed to persuade Hester to give him up, renounced her mother altogether.

"According to Queeney" is a twice-told story of Johnson's intimacy with the Thrales: discrete episodes related by a third-person narrator are interspersed with invented letters written by Queeney many years later, elaborating upon the scenes we have just witnessed. Most of the letters are addressed to Laetitia Hawkins (her father, Sir John Hawkins, was one of the biographers eclipsed by Boswell), who is planning her own memoir of Johnson's circle. In answering Laetitia's queries, Queeney is polite but wary; as it happens, Queeney regards Johnson's associates as a bunch of dolts and lunatics. She takes the opportunity to get her digs in at Garrick and Goldsmith; her main order of business, however, is to destroy her mother's reputation.



Beryl Bainbridge

BARRY BLITT

Queeney's loathing for Hester is all the more compelling for having no single identifiable cause. Bainbridge portrays a hatred as intense as love, a relation so envenomed that every gesture, no matter how harmless, is misunderstood or resented. Hester tries to straighten her daughter's necklace, and the child slaps her hand away. On a trip to France, the Thrales and Johnson become separated while sightseeing at Fontainebleau, and when they see him sitting on a bench Hester asks Queeney to run ahead and tell him they are coming; the girl deliberately slows her pace. And, although Queeney never becomes likable—or even particularly trustworthy—the novelist's inspired selection of commonplace family frictions lends her character's flinty opinions weight and force as the novel proceeds.

Because Hester Thrale earned prestige as Johnson's confidante (her own book about Johnson was a best-seller after his death), Queeney goes after Johnson, too: his table manners are disgusting, his demands for Hester's attention excessive, and there is frequently a "strong odor about his person." But the narrator shares Queeney's revisionist contempt for her subject, detailing "the scarred skin of his cheeks and neck, his large lips forever champing, his shabby clothing . . . his tics and mutterings, his propensity to behave as though no one else were present." When we first meet Dr. Johnson, he is in the midst of a breakdown. Wildly out of control, he has been terrifying his own household for days when Mrs. Thrale and her coachman bundle him into her carriage and take him to Streatham. Not a word in this account evokes sympathy. In place of the suffering of a troubled man, we get the ravings of a repellent maniac. Johnson often spoke of his dread of insanity, and this horrid scene shows precisely what he feared; in both narratives, Bainbridge pits our fastidiousness against our compassion, and our fastidiousness wins out.

From a distance, the flaws of great men become colorful eccentricities: Beethoven turned every place he inhabited into a sty; Coleridge was a dope-addled plagiarist. Since these geniuses are safely dead, we can cherish them, but Queeney spitefully reminds us that in real life we might have crossed the street and hidden in a doorway to avoid them. The final irony here is that Johnson is merely an incidental victim; Queeney's real target is a woman who is remembered only as a footnote in literary history. And yet the damage is done: Bainbridge's virtuoso response to Johnson's lionizers takes command of our feelings and makes us believe something we don't want to. It is less a tour de force than a coup d'état. In the end, though, Bainbridge proves the same point that Boswell did: art always triumphs over life. ♦

THE THEATRE

ARMS AND THE WOMAN

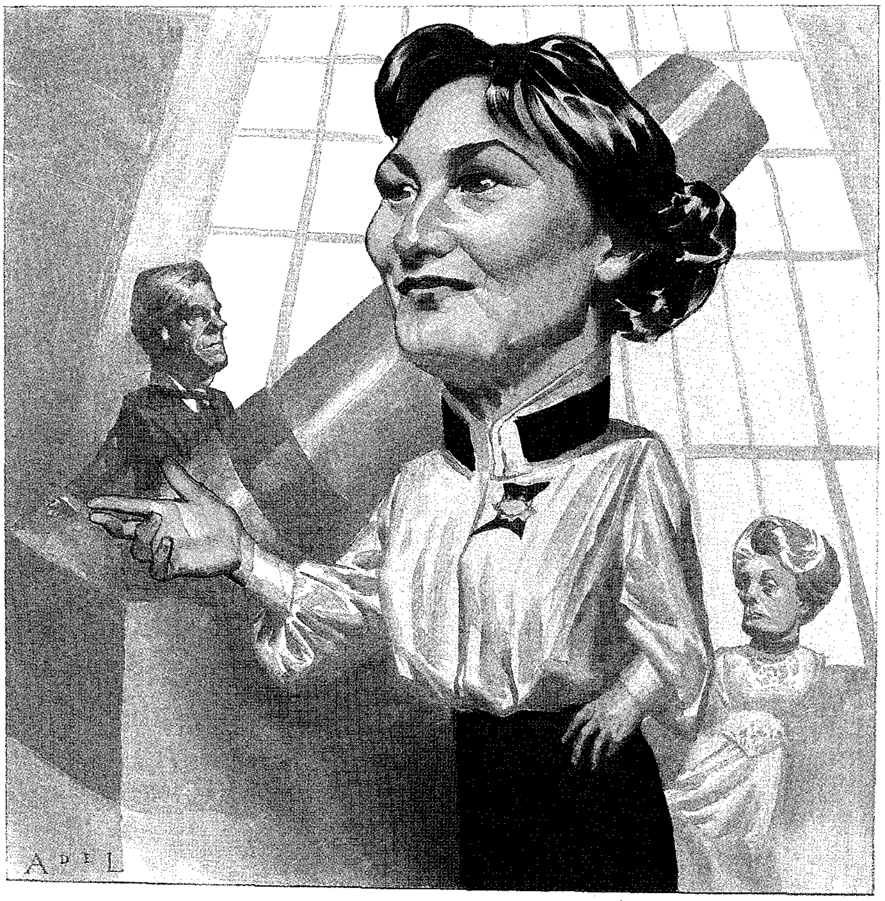
George Bernard Shaw on getting and spending.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

That the world in which George Bernard Shaw wrote "Major Barbara," his 1905 theatrical examination of the social order, was a different one from the one we now live in can be gleaned from his preface to the play. "There are two measures just sprouting in the political soil, which may conceivably grow to something valuable," he wrote. "One is the institution of a Legal Minimum Wage. The other, Old Age Pensions." But the difference between Shaw's era and ours is not so much that a social safety net now exists where none did before but that in his time there was urgent and regular debate about the very nature of the society that net was intended to underlie. Shaw goes on to propose a measure that is more than palliative: the institution of "Universal Pensions for Life," as a way of eradicating poverty—in other words, from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. The deafening winds of capitalism have by now, and possibly forever, drowned out this kind of radical debate about the way the world should work, which makes the Roundabout's revival of "Major Barbara" perfectly timely: it is taking place in a theatre whose existence is to some extent made possible by corporate donations, in a city whose mayor admitted, after six years in office, to not having given much thought to the citizenry's health-insurance problems until he became ill himself, in a country whose President fought for a tax cut that will benefit largely the people who don't need it. (And it's a weird coincidence that the Salvation Army, which features prominently in the play, was in the news as this production was opening, for trying to obtain an exemption from state and local anti-discrimination laws.) The Irishman Shaw didn't have the English reserve when it came to talking about money; he knew that there was no point in talking about anything else unless you talked about money first.

Being a showman as well as a prescriptive know-it-all, Shaw doesn't endorse socialism directly in "Major Barbara," which is running at the American Airlines Theatre, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan. But, in lively, cheeky fashion, he knocks over any number of sacred cows, the better to highlight the ideological contours of the landscape on which they are grazing. Andrew Undershaft (David Warner), a rich munitions manufacturer, has been summoned by his wife, Lady Britomart (the wonderfully funny Dana Ivey), to her house in London—they are separated—for a family conference. Their two daughters are engaged and need money from him, and there is the question of what to do with their son, Stephen (Zak Orth), a twenty-four-year-old personification of upper-class righteous ineffectuality. It has been so many years since Undershaft has seen his children that he doesn't even recognize them, but he quickly warms up to his daughter Barbara (Cherry Jones), who is a soldier of God in the Salvation Army; even though their philosophies of life are in exact opposition, they share a good-humored vivacity and a belief that they're fighting the good fight, and each sees in the other a possible convert in the making. Barbara believes that "there are neither good men nor scoundrels: there are just children of one Father." Undershaft, for his part, practices "the true faith of an Armorer": "to give arms to all men who offer an honest price for them, without respect of persons or principles." In their different ways, they both preach the gospel of equality.

In the crisis that is the climax of the play—when Undershaft, with a stroke of the pen across his checkbook, destroys Barbara's faith in the purity of the Salvation Army—a lower-class lout named Bill Walker asks her tauntingly, "What price salvation now?" (Or, as Shaw has helpfully spelled it in the play, for the



The luminous Cherry Jones as a soul-saving soldier of God in "Major Barbara."

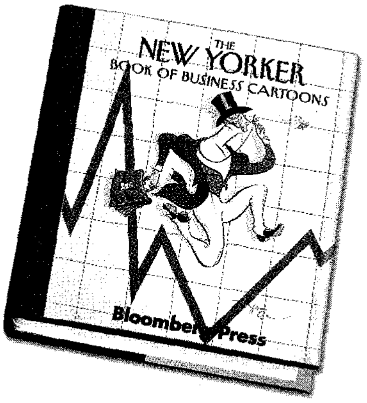
benefit of actors not brought up in the East End, "Wot prawce selvytion nah?") Barbara's romantic illusions about her work have been shattered; and to convey this kind of disillusionment you could do no better than to cast Cherry Jones. And yet the luminous Jones, who has so many times made so much of the mixture of heartbreak and hope, is not quite able to give a sense of a light going out or, later in the play, of its being relit. Undershaft, who has an almost jolly sense of being in the right, is in Warner's performance too obviously a shady character. (Though it's possible that my perceptions are colored by Warner's having played the evil valet who tried to kill Leonardo DiCaprio in "Titanic.") And Denis O'Hare, in the part of Adolphus, Barbara's fiancé, is a muddle; he seems to have marbles in his mouth, which has a way of preventing his character's insouciant intelligence from coming through. But it is really "Major Barbara" itself that has limits; its concerns—its "issues"—are spelled out all too thoroughly and clearly. One could say that there's nothing at stake in this play except the future of humanity; when it comes to actual human beings, Shaw here is perhaps too clever by half, the extra half-portion of cleverness serving as a substitute for emotional depth. The play does draw you in on its own terms—those of a spirited debate—but while "Major Barbara" appears to be an invitation to the audience to think, underneath its merry-prankster ironies is a finger-wagging schoolmaster telling you what to think.

Douglas Carter Beane's new play, "Music from a Sparkling Planet," a Drama Dept. production at the Greenwich House Theatre, is unlikely to cause the same kind of buzz that his "As Bees in Honey Drown" did four years ago, but then "Bees" was about buzz, and fame, and New York, and writing, and making yourself up as you go along—subjects dear to our hearts in this city, especially when they are given such smart treatment as they were in Beane's play. "Music from a Sparkling Planet," which is under the direction of Mark Brokaw (who also directed "Bees"), concerns not the loss of innocence but the attempt by three men in Philadelphia to reconnect to the innocence of their boyhood, when they had—hold on to your hats—hope for the future. Now their lives are going nowhere, professionally and personally; they are in their late thirties, but, as one of them says, they are adults "on paper only." One night, as Miller (T. Scott Cunningham), a publicist, Wags (Josh Hamilton), a lawyer, and Hoagie (Ross Gibby), a personal trainer, stand around a bar and play their habitual TV-trivia game—why, they wonder, did the Howells, on "Gilligan's Island," pack so much clothing for a three-hour tour?—they start to reminisce about a woman named Tamara Tomorrow, who used to introduce cartoons on a local TV show. The show went off the air after several years, and Tamara disappeared; they now make it their mission to find out what has become of her—and, maybe, what will become of them.

In a flashback to the early seventies, we see Tamara (the sparkling J. Smith-Cameron) on the set of the show. Wearing silver antennae and a futuristic pink costume, and pretending to be living in the year 3000, she tells viewers what life will be like in the years to come: by 1996, everyone will have a jet pack and fly to school; by 2005, "all meals will just be a pill." People who grew up with this vision of the future remember how entrancing it was (I'm still bummed about the whole jet-pack thing not happening). As Miller says later in the play, "There's nothing so reassuring as the past's view of the future." (Miller is gay, and therefore the possessor of much droll, rueful wisdom.) While Smith-Cameron is talking, we see her image projected on some of the stacked TV screens that form the proscenium, and the sense of magic that Miller, Wags, and Hoagie remember does come across. But Tamara's reality, we discover, was more earthbound than that of the character she played: her romance with her married producer, Andy (Michael Gaston), fell apart; she began drinking; her sponsor cancelled her show. If all this sounds like a pileup of clichés—and it does, doesn't it?—the play's resolution will strike you as one, too, but "Planet," though it is schematic at times, isn't a wallow in nostalgia. Beane doesn't make too much or too little of the characters' quest, and there is an admirable precision to the play's sadness and sweetness. It's not just an empty "Lost in Space" lunchbox. ♦

DANIEL ADEL

Very funny business, indeed!



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US AND THEM

Unhappy teen-agers and Hollywood stars.

BY DAVID DENBY

Larry Clark, the creator of the semi-scandalous book of photographs "Teenage Lust" and the director of "Kids," has an unmistakable obsession: teen-agers thickheaded and dreamy with sex, their faces unfocussed, their skinny bodies exposed. The young actors in Clark's new film, "Bully," have no protection against the camera and don't seem to want any. Lying in each other's arms in bed, or sitting intertwined, stoned and drinking, in a Mustang convertible going from nowhere to nowhere, they yield themselves completely to Clark's mania. "Bully" offers the suburban teen vision of perfect pleasure, the dream of floating indolence—though, in this case, paradise leads to disaster. Lisa (Rachel Miner), who is perhaps seventeen, falls in love with a high-school dropout, Marty (Brad Renfro), a guarded, uncommunicative surfer and mall rat who veers between sweetness and incoherent violence. Marty has lived his entire life under the thumb of a slightly older boy, Bobby Kent (Nick Stahl), who bosses him around and beats him up at will; Bobby abuses Lisa and her girlfriends, too, so Lisa decides, without much thought, that killing him will solve everyone's problems. "Bully" is based on events that took place near Fort Lauderdale, in Broward County, Florida, in 1993. The point of the movie—which the writers, Zachary Long and Roger Pullis, have closely adapted from Jim Schutze's 1997 "true crime" book of the same title—is that Lisa, Marty, and their friends are too stupid and unimaginative to do anything *but* murder Bobby. "Bully" is a comic-pathetic exposure of the American boredom and disconnection that produces meaningless killings and school shootouts. The movie is accomplished, frightening, and at times bizarrely funny, yet it's also enraging. As in "Kids" (1995), his earlier teen-eros death trip, Clark appears split between deploring the teens' emptiness and finding their erotic stupor attractive.

Larry Clark, who is fifty-eight, probably takes a greater interest in teen sex than teen-agers do. As the camera wanders—grazes—among naked thighs and tattooed torsos, this punk Picasso combines the multiple desires of lover, artist, and voyeur. Yet I can't say that I suffered greatly while looking at the naked girls and boys, and that's part of what's maddening: Clark has caught us up in the toils of his rapture. Is he simply a pornographer, then? No, he is not, and treating him as if he were is a huffy way out of a difficult problem. "Kids," a sexualized view of Manhattan skateboarders, may have been a lurid fabrication, a stunted and dishonest movie, but this time I think Clark is onto something. In "Bully," he shows us how the cocoon of saturated intimacy, the kids' complete absorption in one another, leads to a catastrophic innocence—not moral innocence but metaphysical innocence. Lisa and her friends do not know that anything outside their desires exists. The world is neither threatening nor enticing—it's not there for them at all.

"Bully" is centered in the flat, faceless suburbs west of Fort Lauderdale, though the teen-agers wander east to the ocean and west to the alligator swamps—the geographic and poetic boundaries of their restlessness. Many of the white middle-class families have recently arrived from the North; the parents seem too distracted and lazy to monitor their dropout children very closely, and the kids, left with nothing to interest them (pornography and video games are their only culture), become enthralled by a sadist because he at least cares enough to abuse them. They have no idea—not a clue—that their acquiescence is the source of Bobby's power, that they could destroy him by simply walking away. Lisa, a kind of Pizza Hut Lady Macbeth, conceives of the murder as a way of having Marty all to herself; she can't imagine a reality in which the police, courts, and prisons might disrupt their union. Lost in a dream created by need and loneliness, she hardly sees the actual Marty, who, as Brad Renfro embodies him, is a cringing loser, furtive, confused, and egoless, his eyes narrowed defensively. Renfro gives a brave and serious performance as this chaotic child, but Nick Stahl, as Bobby—eyes hooded, with a raffish grin—is a major weakness. He's not charismatic enough to let us fully experience Bobby's hold on the others. The rest of the young actors dither on in an infantile way, trusting Clark so much that they reveal the most unflattering versions of themselves—Michael Pitt, for instance, who plays the hapless stoner Donny, his hair falling in his face, young, beautiful, and already so wrecked that he can't remember anything for more than a few seconds.

Clark doesn't bother with the kind of square sociological "understanding" that made fifties juvenile-delinquent movies so lugubrious; nor does he offer a romantic or glamorous portrait of doomed youth. "Bully" is pitiless and derisive—closer, at its best, to hip black comedy than to tragedy. From moment to moment, the movie plays with a truthfulness sharpened by amazement and disgust. Clark captures the affectlessness, the uncreated consciousness out of which a monstrous idea emerges as a plausible solution to a nagging problem. The kids plot the murder as if they were planning a party; they blab to their friends, gather weapons, and hire a neighborhood tough who poses as a Mafia hit man to help them. It's a goof, an act of bravado in which they show off for one another. The murder itself, like a practical joke gone awry, starts and stops, then lurches ahead—they kill Bobby because the act, once begun, has to be completed. A terrified improvisation turns into butchery. Even after the murder, most of

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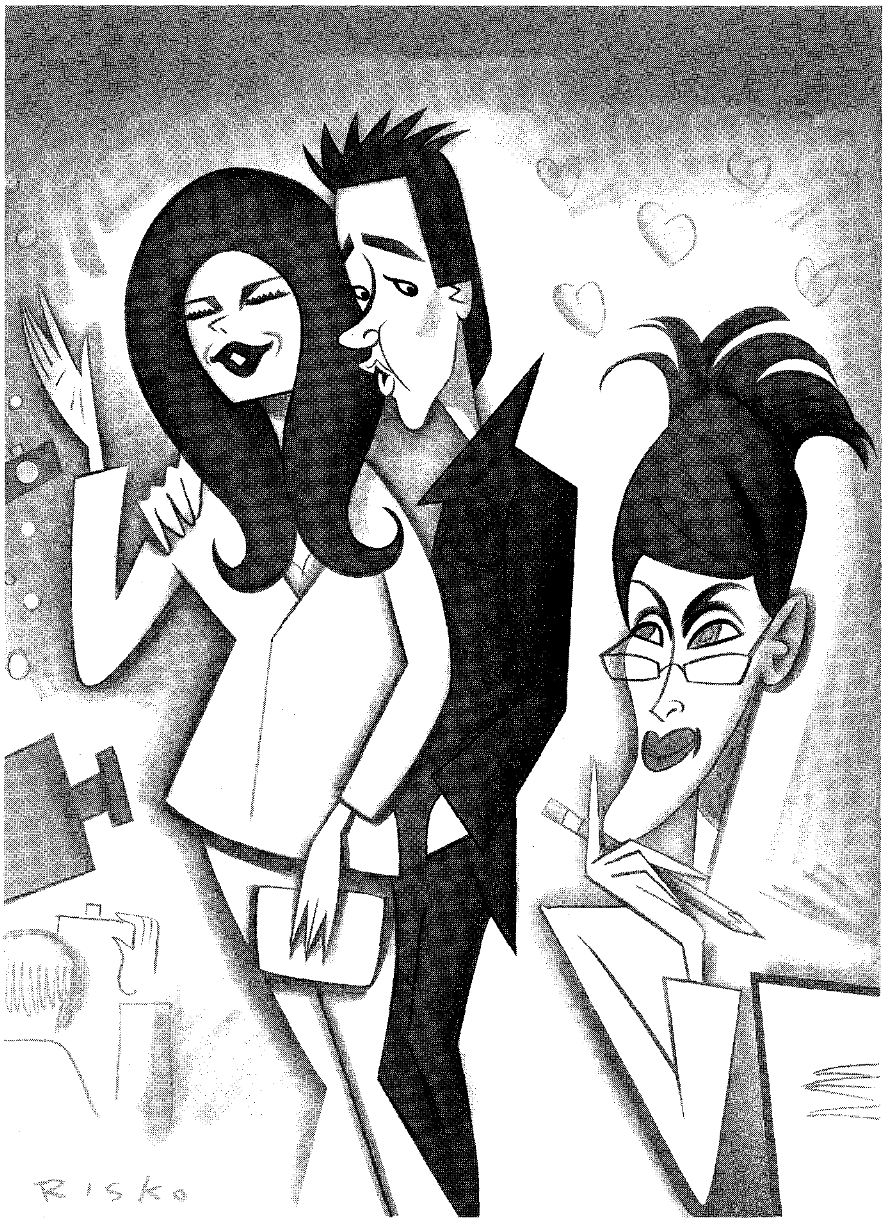


Catherine Zeta-Jones, John Cusack, and Julia Roberts in "America's Sweethearts."

ROBERT RISKO

the kids can't accept the reality of it; they immediately distance themselves, insisting that they had little to do with it. They never become fully conscious; judgment hits them the way a wall hits a car that has been speeding without its lights on.

"Bully" is a brilliant achievement in many ways. Yet a director limited to carnal consciousness cannot tell us more of what we want to know about violence, which is "Why?" Funny and scornful as it is, and convincingly observed on the surface, "Bully" offends and frustrates our desire to understand. Larry Clark remains both the poet of youthful torpor and something of a scoundrel—the mangy haplessness of dumb teen-agers is exactly what eroticizes them for him.

And Clark is falling rapidly into brazen hypocrisy. He stages scene after scene of kids making love, but then, at the end of the movie, he does a nearly silent cameo as an outraged father. Clark's posing as a burning-eyed observer, as if he were a Renaissance artist painting himself into a religious scene, is laughable at best. Larry Clark is no moralist. He is, however, enough of an artist to make us wish that, once and for all, he would pull himself together and practice his art without jumping into bed with it.

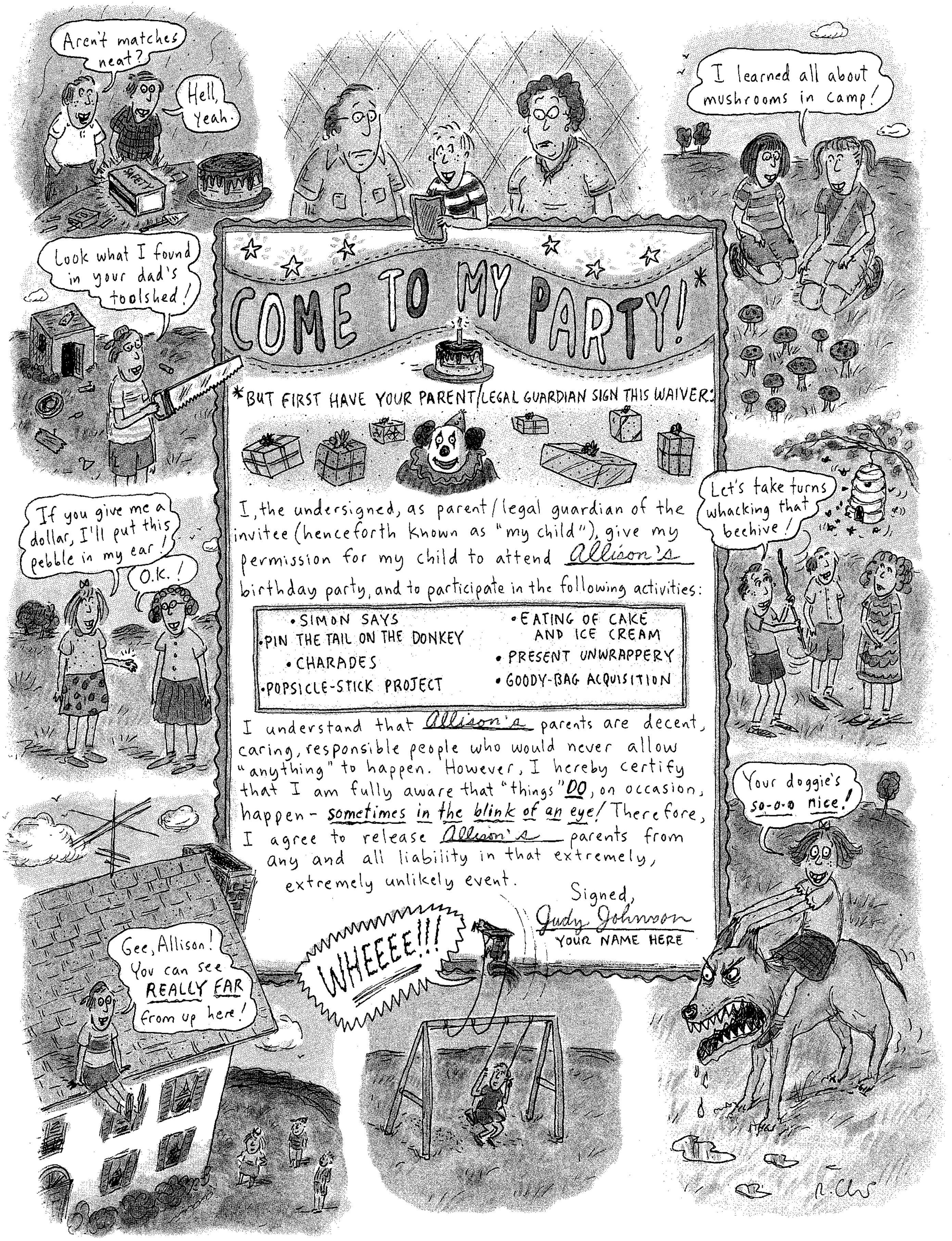
Though set in the present, the movie-colony farce "America's Sweethearts" comes off as a lamely nostalgic attempt to sound like a vintage screwball comedy. The writers, Billy Crystal and Peter Tolan, may not realize that the screenplay Ben Hecht wrote for "Twentieth Century" (1934) and the one Morrie Ryskind did for "My Man Godfrey" (1936) emerged from an entire way of life; the same exhilarating atmosphere can't be approximated with gags and a few funny lines. Since the version of Hollywood that the movie presents would be accurate for perhaps the year 1950, "America's Sweethearts" is doubly off the mark. There's an eruptive studio boss (Stanley Tucci), a powerful press agent who plays Cupid and has a heart of gold (Billy Crystal), and the sweethearts of the title, a married couple (John Cusack and Catherine Zeta-Jones) who have starred in picture after picture together and have millions of fans. Sorry, but if any studio of today were interested in nurturing a romantic couple it would necessarily be making movies for grownups, and today's studios are doing nothing of the kind. "America's Sweethearts" is pleasantly beside the point. Can anyone believe in Julia Roberts as a Cinderella figure—Zeta-Jones's dumpy sister, who loses weight and blooms after years of servitude? It's too late in Roberts's career for this stale stuff—it insults the audience that has watched her grow from a big, gawky girl to a confident woman. Amazingly, ersatz as the role is, Roberts fires up that smile and becomes the best thing in the movie. Cusack's part is poorly written, and the hangdoggish fellow he plays and the rather grand Zeta-Jones wouldn't have got married in a hundred years. This large-scale comedy is puckish and emotionally remote; the filmmakers don't have the heart to confront what Hollywood is like today, and they keep missing any kind of vital satirical tone—and missing an audience that's eager for big-star comedy, too. ♦

SEEMINGLY UNRELATED CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Grass Valley-Nevada City (Calif.) Union.

- A business owner on the 800 block of East Main Street reported at 10:34 a.m. that several people were holding signs that said, "End Is Near," frightening customers. Police were unable to locate the group.
- A resident on the 300 block of Bennett Street reported at 2:27 p.m. a threatening phone call from an unknown person playing gothic music.

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST



COME TO MY PARTY!*

*BUT FIRST HAVE YOUR PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN SIGN THIS WAIVER:

I, the undersigned, as parent/legal guardian of the invitee (henceforth known as "my child"), give my permission for my child to attend Allison's birthday party, and to participate in the following activities:

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- PIN THE TAIL ON THE DONKEY
- CHARADES
- POPSICLE-STICK PROJECT
- EATING OF CAKE AND ICE CREAM
- PRESENT UNWRAPPERY
- GOODY-BAG ACQUISITION

I understand that Allison's parents are decent, caring, responsible people who would never allow "anything" to happen. However, I hereby certify that I am fully aware that "things" DO, on occasion, happen – sometimes in the blink of an eye! Therefore, I agree to release Allison's parents from any and all liability in that extremely, extremely unlikely event.

Signed,
Judy Johnson
YOUR NAME HERE

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Hell, yeah.
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I learned all about mushrooms in camp!
Look what I found in your dad's toolshed!
Let's take turns whacking that beehive!
If you give me a dollar, I'll put this pebble in my ear!
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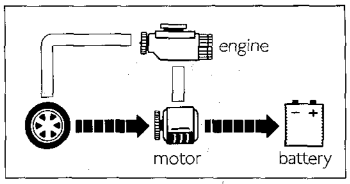

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